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THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

VOL. I.

THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

"At least, not rotting like a weed,
But having sown some generous seed.
Fruitful in further thought and deed."
TENNYSON'S "*Two Voices*."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE CURATE OF SADBROOKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWN OF SADBOROUGH AND THE CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE.

Gen. Rev. Ray 3 Mar 55 Sadbrook

THE small town of SADBOROUGH is situated in one of our western counties. A traveller approaching the town from the east, would probably miss the beautiful meadow lands and rich pastures of Hampshire ; or one coming in the other direction, the long green lanes, with their mossy banks and over-arch-

ing trees, running from one to another on the little hamlets of thatched cottages which make so picturesque the lovely land of Devon. Yet Sadbrough has many advantages and beauties of its own—its proximity to the sea in one direction, and to high breezy downs in another, make it peculiarly healthy ; and there are not wanting, even in its immediate neighbourhood, many of those sweet rustic villages and little leafy nooks which are so peculiarly characteristic of our island.

Although so far from London, the little town has always managed to keep pace pretty fairly with the rest of the world ; and the many comfortable-looking brick-built houses in the town, and the number of gentlemen's villas in the neighbourhood, prove that the trade carried on has been a tolerably successful one.

On entering the town from the London

road, the first object of interest that meets the eye is the ruin of a convent. It was one of the very earliest built in Britain ; but of the original edifice no stone has been left for many centuries. It has, however, been rebuilt several times, and that building of which the ruin is now standing, was erected in the time of Henry the Seventh ; and falling somewhat into decay during the reign of his successor, was restored when England was under the sway of the first Mary. The beautiful chapel, still the most perfect part of the ruin, though its only roof is now the blue vault of heaven, was then repaired and beautified, and again used for the performance of mass.

The river Sad, from which the town takes its name, washes the walls of the convent, and then runs on by the side of a beautiful avenue of English poplars ; through which a road leads, from that part where was once

the convent door, to an arched gateway that was the entrance to the grounds.

Ever on the night when the moon is at the full, the people of Sadborough relate that a female figure, clad in a black dress, with a long white veil falling over her head and shoulders, emerges from the convent door, and walking hastily down the avenue, is at length lost to sight amidst the trees on the other side of the gateway.

The coachman of the royal mail, in the days when that was the only conveyance, would point with his whip at the convent, showing the place to his passengers ; and if there was one on the box by his side who had been an agreeable companion by the way, and who was willing to hear the story, would relate his version of the legend of the White Lady. Most decidedly would he state he had often seen her himself ; but they were always chang-

ing the time of the coach. When it came in late, he had shown her to very many. Some said she went to meet her lover, and some that she did not like the convent, and went out on purpose to drown herself—he thought that the most likely. But whatever were the rights of it, for certain she was drowned in the river, and for certain she walked still every night of the full moon. But the reader must have a clearer account of the legend than that given by the coachman.

In the old days, says the story, a powerful vassal of the King of Wessex had a beautiful daughter, called Bertha. In some way she met, and, as the consequence of meeting, fell in love with Earl Wolfstan, a wealthy nobleman allied to the King of the East Angles, who was on his part deeply enamoured of the fair lady. The feuds between the monarchs, however, prevented the course of true love from

running smooth ; and her father, finding out their attachment, immured his daughter in the convent of St. Catherine. But Cupid laughs at bars and bolts. Through some crevice even in the monastery wall was a note conveyed to the Lady Bertha, informing her that on the night of the full moon the Earl Wolfstan, in a swan-necked vessel manned with stout sailors, would be waiting for her at the mouth of the Holy Brook, as the river was then called.

As there was no ghost to terrify her in those days, punctually at the hour appointed she went. How she escaped the vigilance of the old Abbess, how she defied the lynx-eyed watching of the nuns, with what she bribed the porter at the gate, the history does not inform us ; but down the poplar avenue, through the arched gateway, and across the raised pathway through the marsh, which

was in those days the thoroughfare, on she went, undeterred by any thought of danger, and arrived at the time appointed at the mouth of the Holy Brook. Wearily did she strain her eyes looking for the vessel of her lover, anxiously did she wait for his arrival, hour after hour did she pace up and down the shore; but, at last, whether in despair at what she thought his desertion she threw herself in, or whether, in her distress, she accidentally walked into the river, is unknown; but certain is the fact, she was drowned in its dark waters.

Some fishermen, in the morning, found the body of a nun, with a long white veil, floating on the water, and carried her to the convent; it was the body of the Lady Bertha. The nuns were assured that the Evil One in person had decoyed away their sweet sister, and drowned her in the Holy Brook, which never

after that day was known by any other name than the Sad.

Earl Wolfstan came with his vessel the next day ; he had unhappily been detained by contrary winds ; putting off as soon as the morning broke, and returning again with the set of the sun, for three long nights did he watch for the coming of the Lady Bertha. At length, believing that her love was not equal to the trial he had laid on it, he sailed away and married some other damsel. But (the legend continues) he heard in some manner of her fate, and desire for revenge brooded deeply in the bosom of the impious earl. After awhile he collected together a few ships ; and naming his own after his lost love, he landed one night at the mouth of the river, and, with his followers, attacked the convent, laying it in ruins, and sparing only the chapel for the sake of the grave of the Lady Bertha.

Carrying off some of the nuns, he and his companions regained their ships. But vengeance suffered not the sacrilegious noble to escape. The south-west wind, the terror of sailors on the south coast then as much as now, arose in its mighty power; and the wild waters engulfed alike the destroyers and their helpless prey, delivering the nuns from the grasp of those wild chiefs, and sending Earl Wolfstan and those who had joined in the sinful work to the destruction they had so truly earned.

Such is the old tale, and should any reader of these pages ever chance to be turning over the leaves of Domesday Book, and there find the place mentioned, it will be under the name of "The Convent of St. Catherine, by the Stream of the Holy Brook." But it has seen many changes since those days. Several of the nuns who resided there in the reign of Queen Mary, left after the accession of Eliza-

beth. Still, shorn as they were of many privileges, a few lingered on till the time of Cromwell. Then a party of his Ironsides entered the convent, laid violent hands on the possessions of the unhappy nuns, feasting on the provisions of the well-filled larder, draining the cellar of its choice wines, and dividing among themselves the contents of the money chest; while many a nun, with her long white veil floating behind her, was seen that night of the full moon flying in terror down the poplar avenue.

In mere wantonness the troopers drove their swords and the butt-ends of their muskets through the beautiful painted windows of the chapel, and stalled their horses within the precincts of the high altar. Then it was that Serjeant Simon Scatter-the-Wolves, having, according to his own language, torn down the statues of Baal and Ashtoreth, and

swept the convent with the besom of destruction, finally completed what the Royalist party called a piece of wanton mischief, and many an act of villainous sacrilege, but what he styled the work of the Lord, by preaching to his troop standing on the Lady Bertha's grave, with an open Bible in one hand, and a loaded pistol in the other.

The Convent of St. Catherine may be seen in many an exquisite painting; it is still a favourite subject for the sketch-book of the artist. The love of the Earl's daughter was the theme of more than one ballad of the olden time. "The Woes of Lady Bertha, or the Legend of the Sad," may still be heard in song and story from the people of the neighbourhood.

Even Serjeant Simon Scatter-the-Wolves had no power to scatter the vision of the Lady Bertha. Many of his troop declared they saw

her even while he was preaching ; and the evidence given of her presence on the following full moon was most satisfactory. Oftentimes have strangers endeavoured to assure the townspeople that there is nothing to be seen but the moonlight playing amid the branches of the trees ; but “as he who’s convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still,” the ghost of the White Lady still takes her moonlight walk down the avenue, and will probably continue to do so for many a long year to come. Indeed, with the exception of a few new-comers, the inhabitants of SADBorough would as soon think of allowing a depredator to deprive them of some piece of valuable personal property, as permit a stranger to take away their visionary possession of the White Lady.

After passing the convent, the road continues straight on to the town. The entrance

is through a narrow tortuous street, but this gradually widens, and the High Street of Sadborough, both as regards width and length, is a very respectable thoroughfare. On the right side stands the church, a fine Gothic edifice, and opposite to it is the Town-Hall, with a handsome clock over the entrance.

A busy place is the High Street of Sadborough on a market-day ; the pavements on each side covered with stalls, butchers showing their prime beef and mutton, cheesemen in their snow-white frocks praising their "blue vinny," and their tubs of butter, stalls of ready-made clothes, one or two of cakes, with perhaps a few toys ; and in the summer the addition of some shrubs and flowers. But still busier is it in the days of the great cattle fairs, when the streets are full of horses and cattle, and prime flocks of the black-faced

South Downs, and droves of fearfully-screaming pigs, add to what seems almost inextricable confusion.

Plenty of work is there then for the buxom mistress of the "Blue Boar," to provide dinner for the sturdy farmers; and plenty of work for the ostler to look after the farmers' nags, with which the stable is thronged; a good deal of money changes hands in those days; and then the farmers return home, somewhat jovial, as they consider the proper thing on fair-day; and then the little town relapses into its usual quiet state.

But the whole town is not so wealthy-looking as the High Street. There are many other parts—long back lanes, short side streets leading to them, courts and alleys innumerable.

They have strange names for some of these streets—there is Fivefinger Street, so called

because five other streets branch from it; these are Duck Lane, Rogues Roost, Spinning Alley, Wolfs Road—supposed to be that Earl Wolfstan took in his landing—and Lady's Lane, where the road once went through the marshes.

There are some rope-walks in the town, and several factories for the manufacture of twine. At the doors of many of the houses and small shops may be seen little square frames, on which the twine is wound.

On the whole, Sadborough is a bustling, active town, differing little from many others in the county; its only distinguishing feature being the ruined convent and chapel of St. Catherine, and the faith of its inhabitants in the vision of the White Lady.



CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS AT FAIRLEIGH.

ABOUT five o'clock on the afternoon of a Christmas Eve, some thirty years ago, a knot of people might have been seen collecting around the "Blue Boar," the principal inn, situated in the High Street of Sadborough. It was the hour for the coming in of the London coach—for there were no rails thirty years ago ; and quite an event in the day was the arrival of the one coach, or rather mail, which brought passengers, letters and parcels, eatables, fashions, books, papers, and what-not, to the good people of Sadborough.

Round the door of the inn were congregated ostlers waiting to change the horses ; porters on the look-out for a job ; gentlemen's servants, some belonging to the town, and others who had ridden in from the country, waiting for the hampers of turkeys, barrels of oysters, and other good things which were sure to be sent by town friends, in preparation for the Christmas dinner.

There were many loungers there, of all classes : people who went to look at the coming in of the coach, and then went home again ; they did not expect it to bring anything to them, but it was something to do. Unless they were ill, or something very particular came in the way (and with such sort of people there is very rarely anything in the way), they would come again on the morrow.

Among the group were three nice gentlemanly-looking boys, of ages varying from

fourteen to about ten. These were Cecil, Guy, and Frank, sons of Hugh Knightly, Esq., of Fairleigh House, SADBorough, and magistrate for the county.

As the clock struck the half hour, true to its time almost to a minute the horn was heard, and a few minutes after the coach, drawn by four greys (screws, doubtless, according to A. K. H. B.—that most entertaining of essayists), drove up at a slashing pace to the door of the inn. The coachman dismounted, rolling under the weight of his heavy capes, and beating his arms to unstiffen them, went in to warm himself at the bright fire that shed a ruddy glow across the road. The passengers followed his example ; the horses were quickly unfastened by the nimble hands of the well-accustomed ostlers ; boxes and hampers were taken down, and others put up, giving abundant employment to the porters ; four new

horses, three bays and a black this time, but no doubt still screws, though they looked very fresh, each pawing the ground, impatient to be off, were harnessed in; then the coachman came out, the guard blew the horn, once and again, before he could induce the lingering passengers once more to face the cold; and then the coach rattled away again over the paved street, to visit other places, to take up and set down more passengers, more bags of letters and more parcels—and so on, until the people from London to Land's End had received either their friends or their turkeys, as the case might be.

Two of the gentlemen, however, who alighted at the “Blue Boar,” had arrived at their journey's end, and were seized on immediately with great delight by the three boys just named. The younger, a fine young man of perhaps one-and-twenty, had been sitting

on the coach-box ; and to say truth it was he, and not the coachman, who brought the greys up in such dashing style that evening ; but coachee knew they were safe enough in the hands of Hugh Knightly, to whom he had first given the ribbons himself some years before, when he took him backwards and forwards to school, and who was sure to give him a handsome tip for the sake of “auld lang syne.”

The other gentleman had been sitting just behind him, and was perhaps five or six years older. They both shook hands heartily with the boys, who overpowered them with questions, which they answered as best they could while looking after their luggage. Presently, however, a hand was laid on each shoulder, and looking round there was more shaking of hands, and more greetings, warm enough to keep off the chill that frosty night.

The new comer was James Knightly, the eldest brother of Hugh and the boys. By his dress it was evident he was a clergyman. He was rather a little man, at least he looked so by the side of his brother Hugh and his friend, who were neither much under six feet. But it will be better to see them all by the light of something brighter than that of the oil lamps which then illuminated the High Street of SADBorough, before attempting to describe any of the party. They all walked quietly away together.

“We have a beautiful ashen faggot to-night in the hall, Hugh,” said Cecil; “I saw it lighted, and it will be burning up by the time we get home.”

“You mustn’t keep dinner waiting, either of you,” said Guy; “we dine at six, and we are all to dine with you to-day.”

“No, we must be sure not to be late,”

chimed in Frank ; “ for the choir from SADBROOKE are having tea at our house ; and after dinner they are to come into the hall and sing, and see the ashen faggot, and have minced pie and mulled wine—won’t it be jolly ? ”

“ Alice has been trying to get my choir into something like order for me, Hamilton,” said the young clergyman—“ the singing was so bad at SADBROOKE ; but they have improved greatly under her care, and in some things acquit themselves now quite creditably.”

“ And Maude Wilmot helps Alice, Hugh,” said Cecil. “ I like to hear Maude sing ; and we have all of us been helping, too, since we left school.”

“ That must have improved them wonderfully,” replied his brother ; “ if they are not first-rate after your instruction, it must be a hopeless case.”

“ I can sing, Hugh ; and I have been practising duets with Maude ; and we have been dressing up Jem’s church—it looks quite lovely ! I got almost all the berries ; and we don’t any of us think he knows altogether what we have been doing, he is always so busy—but it has been great fun ! ”

“ They would never have got on without you, Cecil, that is clear. James will have no singing at church when you go back to school ; he will have to shut it all up together, such an invaluable help as you must have been.”

“ You ain’t a bit more steady, Hugh, for all the hard reading you talk of. I don’t much believe in it myself—but here we are at home. I hope dinner’s ready—I know I am.”

The servant threw open the hall door as their steps were heard, and they all entered ;

and then came more shaking of hands, more Christmas greetings, and one rather shy but not the less affectionate welcome ; for Hamilton had been engaged to Alice Knightly for some months, and was now looked upon as quite one of themselves by all the family at Fairleigh.

However, the welcomes were obliged to be very short, for the young men had to change their travelling-dress ; and as they went upstairs to do so, Mr. Knightly called after them to beg they would not keep dinner waiting, as they must not be late, on account of the singers.

A very happy dinner it was—all the family collected together ; the only additions to the party being Maude and Annie Wilmot, near neighbours, who had been so much with the young Knightlys from childhood, that no meeting was ever considered perfectly happy

unless they were present. And now, as we have them all together, it will not be a bad time to give the reader some idea of the people he has been brought amongst.

At the bottom of the table sat the father, a gentlemanly-looking man, somewhat past middle age; and at the top, the fragile, gentle mother, whose cup of happiness, as she glanced at those bright faces that evening, was full. Next to her was Hamilton, a man of heavier build and quieter manners than any of the Knightlys, yet with the stamp of very high intellect on his lofty brow; one who enjoyed a joke very dearly in his own way, but who in repartee was no match for the volatile beings around him. He was a barrister, and far from a briefless one; and now that the start was made, there was every prospect of his soon gaining a name even in a profession where learning and talent are no

rare things. He was decidedly handsome, of fair complexion, and with regular features. He was of Scotch extraction ; and although his family had lived many years in England, he still betrayed his origin in his grave manner, and perhaps also in his looking somewhat older than he really was, which was just five-and-twenty.

Next him sat Alice, a dark-browed maiden of eighteen, with black hair, and long almond-cut eyes with dark sweeping lashes. A fair share of the beauty of the family had fallen, as was right, to the portion of the only daughter. Hugh was a remarkably fine young man ; not actually handsome, but very far from otherwise. He was reading for the bar, and Hamilton, whose opinion was looked up to by them all, reported him as doing very well indeed.

The three boys were fine open-counte-

nanced lads, all strikingly alike, and Cecil decidedly good-looking, with an eye that flashed mischief at every glance, though it sometimes possessed the deep thoughtful look so remarkable in that of his brother James.

But the "parson," as the boys called him, has yet to be described. As has been already said, he was not nearly so tall a man as his brother Hugh ; but he had a firm, compact, lithe figure that spoke of strength and great powers of endurance. He was undoubtedly handsome ; but he was more than that. The face was of the highest intellectual and, indeed, spiritual type. The forehead was high, full, and rather stern, or at least would have been so, had it not been softened by the deep earnest eye, and the exquisite smile that sometimes, not always, played around the mouth. Such were the Knightlys, much like many others, far from faultless, far from

perfect, yet, with clever heads and warm hearts, a fair specimen of a happy English family.

They had, as Frank said, “a jolly evening.” The ashen faggot burnt splendidly in the wide, open hearth of the hall, and they all stood admiring the beautiful forms into which the burning logs fell—arches, avenues, churches, towers, and whatever their young imaginations liked to picture.

Have you ever seen it burnt, my reader? If not, it is worth coming into the west country to have a look at. I mean the real thing, as it is still to be seen in some gentlemen’s houses, and in old farm-house kitchens, a relic of the old times.

And how the village choir did enjoy themselves, and how really well they sung, greatly to the delight of James and Alice, who had been looking forward to the

performance with no little anxiety ; and whose clear voices mingled with the rustic ones of their pupils, greatly to the improvement of the fine old tunes to which the Christmas hymns and carols were set. Christmas wishes were interchanged, a Christmas blessing asked by the young clergyman, and then the singers went back to their village homes, the family party separated, the ashen faggot died out, and Christmas Eve past away softly, and gently, giving place to the yet more blessed time of the Christmas morning. The Christmas chimes rang out from the tower of SADBorough Church before it was well light, and they were never late people at Fairleigh.

Hugh volunteered to go over with James to SADBROOKE ; and though his brother, as yet rather new to preaching, felt more at

home with only his country audience than when any of his own family were present, he could not say nay, and Cecil and Guy accompanied them.

As the curate walked up the aisle, he saw for the first time the Christmas decorations. It had always been the custom to dress up the church, and this year his sister had offered to superintend and assist at the arrangements.

In former days these consisted of wreaths of evergreens, hung heavily round the pillars, and of large bunches of laurustinas and monthly roses, which, when the winter was not a severe one, were always to be procured from the sheltered gardens of Sadbroke, tied in front of the pulpit and reading-desk. He had never thought of the matter himself, but when his sister spoke to him about it he thought it very kind of her to

interest herself in his church ; and, besides, she said Maude Wilmot would help her, and, to say truth, Maude was very dear to the heart of James Knightly. So he thanked her, and accepted her offer, only stipulating that there should be no symbols that the people might not understand, and which might offend their prejudices ; and then, being very busy just at that time, he actually forgot all about the matter. When, therefore, on emerging from the vestry this Christmas morning, he saw the festive appearance put on by the old church, he was greatly surprised and extremely pleased.

The old-fashioned adornments had been superseded by pretty light twining wreaths of evergreens, and over the communion-table was a small cross of red berries, resting on green leaves of holly. From the reading-desk he saw the Christmas text over the opposite

gallery, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." It was done in laurustinas and roses. There was a wreath of laurustinas on the font, and that was all.

He was very much gratified; it was just what he liked; there was nothing about it like the decorations of a theatre, but the church wore the festive look that was so suitable to the season—and that in the cold wintry weather made it seem, as it were, an emblem of happiness and brightness, a refuge from the chill that was without.

But the service commenced, and he soon again forgot the decorations. Hugh had never heard his brother either read prayers or preach before, and he was greatly struck with the power of his rich musical voice; and in the sermon the idea came to him that if he possessed a share of James's talent, he could

not fail to get on at the bar. But it was not easy to listen to the Curate of SADBROOKE, even young as he then was, without becoming interested in the subject on which he was speaking. And yet it was all very simple; there was no display of learning—it would have been terribly out of place, but the very simplicity was the charm, it gave the hearer such a belief in the reality of what he was saying, as he implored his people to remember the sacredness of the time, kept in memory of that day when the Holy Child was born at Bethlehem, the offering for the world's sins.

After service, Hugh and the boys returned home, and Hugh said to Cecil,

“Jem will be a fine preacher some day, he reads uncommonly well. I hope he won't stay down here long, he ought to get a curacy in London, and he'd soon get on then.”

“The people listen to him though, Hugh,

as if they liked to hear him; and I'm sure they must understand what he says, he makes it all so plain; and he seems very happy here. It must be a great thing to stand up in a pulpit, and have people hang on your words. I shouldn't care to be an indifferent preacher, but if I could do the thing as well as Jem does, I should like to be a clergyman very well."

"Jem wouldn't think much of you as a clergyman, if that is all you wish to be one for; he would tell you that sort were not wanted; he has got very high ideas of what a clergyman works for. I am very glad I took to the Bar, it suits me better, and I felt to-day in a way I never did before, what a solemn thing it must be to enter the Church. If any one takes it up merely for a profession, or to have people hang upon their words, they had better let it alone. That

is my idea, and I advise you to think so too, Cecil."

"The cross looked very pretty, I thought," said Cecil; "I picked all the berries, and Maude made it. I looked so to see if Jem noticed it. I think he did."

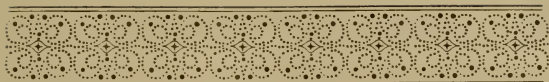
"It does you all great credit—it looked wonderfully different from what it did one Christmas when I went once before; but the great difference after all was in the preaching—it seemed like getting through a task decently then, it was reality now."

The curate did not return with his brothers—he waited for the afternoon service, and he was glad of a walk by himself. Only ordained a few months before, he had already become deeply interested in his work, and felt only far more intensely what Hugh had said to Cecil, that to have entered the Church merely as a profession would indeed have

been a very awful thing. He undertook the charge of the village of Sadbroke with the deep feeling that it was a very sacred trust—the most solemn that can be undertaken. And now, amid many failings and much weakness, he was endeavouring earnestly to devote life and soul to Him whom he called Master.

The dinner at Fairleigh was much like that of the evening before : all meeting round the table, and the evening passed away with music and singing, principally sacred, out of deference to the young clergyman, whom they all loved too dearly not to try and please as much as they could. Not, as they would say, were they by any means sure he was always right. Of course they were not, or they would have been more like him. And so passed Christmas at Fairleigh.





CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS IN DUCK LANE.

FROM the description that has already been given of Sadborough, the reader must have become aware that in that town, as in most others, there were a number of streets and lanes little known to the wealthier inhabitants, and rarely visited by any of the higher classes. Perhaps some lady, having promised her cook she would send up the chimney sweep, found herself, before she was aware, in a region quite unknown to her, although she had lived for

many years within a quarter of a mile of the spot. Or the child of the woman who washed for her laundress had fallen into the fire, and she thought she would go and inquire if any help was needed; or her occasional charwoman was laid up with the rheumatism, a common complaint in Sun Court, and she wished to take her some flannel. These or other like reasons took a lady occasionally into the lower parts of the town.

True, there was the district visitor—but she was not so common thirty years ago as at present; and there was also the clergyman—but he was far too well known to excite any attention. He belonged to them in a measure, they considered; but, as to other ladies and gentlemen, they were out of their sphere; and if any passed, the inhabitants of these regions all came out to

their doors to look, and to criticise dress and manners, and appearance altogether.

And now for a description, as far as can be given, of Duck Lane. It was a mere *cul-de-sac* opening out of Fivefinger Street; but, as in every depth there is a lower depth still, from one side of Duck Lane opened Sun Court—the windows and doors of the eligible residences in which locality, opening as they did within three feet of the high wall of a factory, allowed little of that luminary to be seen, from which cause the name was probably given in passing ridicule, and had stuck to it ever since.

But house rent was cheap in Sun Court. You could get two fair-sized rooms for eighteenpence a week; the same accommodation would have cost two shillings in Duck Lane. To be sure, it cost something

in candles, but they were considered something in the way of luxuries, at least they could be dispensed with when work was not plentiful; so Sun Court was rarely empty of tenants. Not always advantageous tenants, certainly, they had moonlight flittings sometimes, when a neighbour thought some one was ill next door, but found instead in the morning that the family had left. They could not pay their rent, so they went away without; but the landlord was pretty sharp, and did not lose much, on the whole.

On one side, the best side of Duck Lane, opposite Sun Court, the houses had back doors and gardens—rather dirty little gardens, but cabbages would grow in them, though they were sometimes a little sooty, for there was a large iron-foundry near. These gardens had steps that led down to a slimy pond,

which, when the Sad was full, as was generally the case, was full also; but when, in hot summer weather, the Sad was low, this piece of land, covered with water, was neither altogether land nor water, but a piece of marshy ground, with pools thickly scattered over it, wherein frogs croaked and newts abounded. There were frogs and newts, lizards also, in those days; the various species must be surely almost dying out now, the demand for the interesting creatures having been so great for the stocking of vivariums. For as a crystal palace on the hall-table of a house like Fairleigh (where, doubtless, Frank Knightly's children have got them now), does not appear to suit their constitutions so well as the slime and smell of a pond like that in Duck Lane, they require constant replenishing, which must end, in time, in their destruction, unless the taste for

them dies out, as it is not unlikely it will.

There was a passage—a drainway it was the fashion to call it—between two of these houses, with steps also leading down to the water, so that the inhabitants of the opposite side of the street, and those of the neighbouring localities, might also have the benefit of this nice supply. And very convenient they all said it was for washing, though most of them preferred getting their drinking water from a shoot in Fivefinger Street.

Sadborough is much improved, however, since those days—the pond has been drained, the railway station now stands upon its site, there is no longer any Sun Court or Duck Lane, the rails are laid down through those places; and very sorry were many of the tenants to leave, and altogether objected to the alteration. The Sad now runs on, clear and pure, to the sea, the town is lighted with

gas, and its inhabitants consider it one of the nicest and healthiest towns in England ; but that is nothing new, they always had the same opinion of it.

But Christmas comes once a year alike to the dwellers in Sun Court and Duck Lane, as to their more favoured brethren in parks and halls ; and the Christmas chimes that aroused the Knightlys from their slumbers awoke also the family of the Martins in Duck Lane.

Job and Nanny Martin were honest, hard-working people, with a very large family to maintain, and they did their best to fill the mouths of the clamorous little ones with food. They were a very large family : there was Jack the eldest boy, and Sally the biggest girl, and Tom, and Dick, and Suky, and Joe, down to the wee toddling Alexander, and the baby in arms, Alethea. For it is

generally noticeable, in these large families, that the length of the names is in inverse proportion to the size of the children, the elder ones resting content with those of one or two syllables in length, while the baby usually rejoices in something almost unpronounceable, and which, as a matter of course, is pronounced wrong. It is like the nomenclature of shells—the names of the large ones are generally of moderate length, whereas the tiny moluscs receive appellations of at least five or six syllables in length. Job—it surely was a good name for him—was an honest, industrious man, with just knowledge enough to get on with his work as a day-labourer; and Nanny's acquirements consisted of being able to wash and mend, and occasionally clean the house. "She was a bad manager," said the lady visitor, who went once a week as duty-work

into what she called her "district." I wonder whether any of us, or even the lady visitor herself, would have done better under her circumstances.

"I gets on wi' my washing, ma'am," she would say, "as airly as I can in the week; but some of 'em be very short, and their things very plain, and I wash for they arter they's in bed; there's three as I wash for every Saturday night, but they all goes to school and church Sunday morning, and Job goes to church pretty reg'lar, and I goes when I can."

Yes, perhaps she was a bad manager, I scarcely know, but the fact was this, the pressure from without was so much stronger than the power of resistance from within, that the family balloon, instead of careering high in the air, to the admiration of all beholders, with colours waving and flags

flying, was generally lying in the gutter in a state of collapse.

With all her endeavours, Nanny could never overtake her work, the feeding of such a hungry set, and the keeping tidy a lot of reckless boys who walked through mud and mire in their new boots, when they had any, and climbed palings and apple-trees, to the destruction of trousers and pinafores, was altogether too much for her. So, although Job worked hard, and Sally and Jack both nearly earned their own maintenance, still rags were in the ascendant, and Nanny was pronounced "a decidedly bad manager."

There were great preparations for Christmas at the Martins'. Nanny had pinched all the family for weeks to screw out enough to buy a piece of pork, which that morning Sally might have been seen taking, with

great pride, in a brown dish, to the bake-house. There were plenty of potatoes in the dish, and some cabbages, cut out of the garden, were to be cooked at home. There was to be a pudding, but Nanny said she should keep that for supper. They were all busy, very busy, Christmas morning; there was too much to be done for any of them to think of going to church. Job cut the cabbages, Suky washed them, Sally peeled the potatoes, Jack cleaned the three knives that constituted the family stock of cutlery, and Nanny thought, as she superintended the whole, and finally set the dinner on the table, what hard work it must be to be cook in a gentleman's family, where they had meat every day, and puddings on Sundays.

The arrival of the dinner was hailed by a scream of delight from all the younger

children, which was quickly changed into a cry of grief from Alexander, when he was not allowed to make himself master of the whole joint; but order was restored after a little while, and they all sat down very hot and tired to dinner.

But overworked and overfed as they certainly were that day, the father and most of the family went to church in the afternoon, the mother stayed at home with a sick boy and the younger children—it was very rarely she could go out. After church they walked down to Sadport, the harbour of Sadbrough, and distant about half a mile.

There was both export and import trade from this little place; the Sadbrough people made nets and cordage, and sent them to Newfoundland, and received in return oil, and salted cod, and ling, of which they were all amazingly fond. It did not pay badly,

this Newfoundland trade, and in a small way Sadport was a busy place. It was rather an old-fashioned place—there were such funny old wooden piers; running far into the sea, they looked quite worm-eaten and unsafe, green slimy weeds grew all round their sides, and if you walked on the top there were holes, through which you might have fallen. Round the sides, uncovered at half-tide, were narrow ledges, slippery with the green weeds. It was the great delight of the boys, and the girls, too, for the matter of that, to walk on these little ledges, all round the piers, far into the deep water. It was a wonder they were not drowned oftener than they were, for accidents rarely happened; but children are like cats, they must have nine lives, and certainly claws to keep their footing, as they do in such strange places.

Another entertainment was to take a row

on the water. Whenever there was anything of a holiday, there were always boats ready, with boys to row them, into which the children crowded, paying either a penny or a halfpenny, according to the distance they went. It seemed rather fearful to a stranger to see the boats so deep in the water; but no person of the place could remember an accident ever having happened.

Christmas was rather a cold time of year for this diversion; but the day was fine, and there were boats ready, so all the young Martins went out, and enjoyed it very much.

There were several large stores at Sadport, filled up with goods—cordage, twine, nets, oil tubs, timber, coals, and salt fish; on several of them was chalked up the notice, “Salt fish, three halfpence a pound!” Some of the people who owned these stores were

wealthy traders. Fortunes have been made before now by selling things of even less value than three halfpence a pound.

The largest of these stores bore the name of Gain and Twine, merchants of Sadborough. They were wealthy people, landed proprietors, too; the whole of Fivefinger Street, with the adjacent properties of Duck Lane and Sun Court, were the freehold of Mr. Gain. But Mr. Gain possessed another freehold besides this, a very pretty gentleman's house, called Woody Knoll, distant about a mile from Sadborough. There were shrubberies and gardens at Woody Knoll, men-servants also and maid-servants, a carriage and fine horses—and, more than all this, they were very nice people at Woody Knoll. But the dwellings of the poor were not much thought about thirty years ago. Many people do not care about such mat-

ters now ; still, on the whole, things are better than they were then.

Mr. Twine had property also. Rogues Roost and Spinning Alley were his. He had also a very comfortable brick house in the town. He was a wealthy man; but the Twines were not such well-educated or pleasant people in any way as the Gains. But, on the whole, the firm was liked and much respected in the town.

The young Martins wandered about, enjoying themselves extremely, and came home very hungry to tea; and after tea, Job, according to his usual custom (miserable custom), went to the "Goose and Gridiron," in Fivefinger Street. Nanny begged him to come home for the pudding; he promised he would, but did not; and after waiting some time, they were obliged to sit down to supper without him. And then

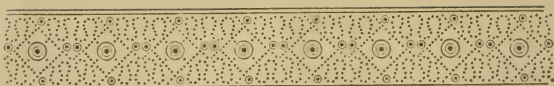
all the children went to bed. Job was not very late—he was by no means a drinking man; yet it would have been very much better for them all had there been no “Goose and Gridiron” in Five-finger Street; or, being there, that he had not gone to it. But in this respect, as in many others, people are very little wiser now than they were thirty years ago.

And this was the way Christmas was spent by the Martins. There are plenty of families to be found like them—they can be told by countless thousands; they have their faults, many and grievous—class faults and individual faults. Much is being done now to endeavour to reform these, which they fall into so much from the circumstances in which they are placed—the efforts are not being made one day too soon.

Will you pardon me, gentle reader, for bringing you into their society?—They have human hearts very like your own; they are often swayed by very much the same feelings; believe me, they are not all evil, though they live in Duck Lane. Now, as there was one young head at Fairleigh that rested on a firmer pillow than the others—a pillow which neither sickness nor sorrow could ever ruffle or take away—one over whom some of the angel choirs who, eighteen hundred years ago, joined in the chorus of the “Peace on earth,” were watching with peculiar tenderness, so was it also in Duck Lane, though in the latter place the object of their solicitude was only a sickly child, weary and very worn. When ere long that child should enter the eternal world, angels would sing halleluiahs, and the church of the first-born rejoice with

exceeding joy, James Knightly would be still on earth, often falling under temptations, mourning over his shortcomings, struggling and striving, watching and praying, yet never struggling or striving as he felt he ought, never either in work or prayer coming up to his one Example. Yet, for him also, when the time should come, would there be the same home; the one blessed beginning will ever have the one glorious end. Verily, there is oftentimes less difference than we are apt to think between dwellers in houses like Fairleigh and those in Duck Lane.





CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK COLT.

A PLEASANT, very pleasant meal was breakfast at Fairleigh, especially when, as on this morning, the family were met together again after absence in town or at school. The day before being Christmas-day, which had taken James to Sadbrooke early, there was much left for inquiry this morning. But breakfast was never a very long business with the Knightlys; there was so much to be seen, so much to be looked after, and they were soon ready to

pay a visit to the stables; Hugh had scarcely seen his horse the day before, and he wanted to have a ride again, after being so long shut up in town. Of course the boys went with them.

“Are you coming, William?” asked Hugh.

No, Hamilton was not coming; Alice and he were going to take a long ramble together; they had scarcely seen each other yet, and they had, of course, a great deal to ask and to tell each other. As they walked through the grounds, Cecil said:—

“Jem’s black colt is grown such a beauty, Hugh, and he has broken it in himself; everybody says how handsome he is, but Jem expects him to be as good as he is; and only yesterday, when we had him out in the gig, an old woman wanted to speak to Jem, and, my! how the colt did start, and how the old woman did run!”

“It was very foolish of her to stop,” said James; “she must have seen how fresh the animal was; and it is nonsense of you to talk so, Cecil—you know he makes a capital riding-horse.”

“Then how was it that you managed nearly to ride over a little boy the other day, when I was out riding with you, only because you called out to know how his mother was?” replied the incorrigible Cecil.

“I have no doubt it will make a capital parson’s horse in time,” said Hugh; “but the parson’s only young himself yet, and they can’t either of them be expected to know the old women and little boys as well as they will by-and-by!”

“I wonder whether Jem will ever be able to tie him up to the old woman’s cottage rails, or hang his bridle over the gate of the new school he means to have.

He'll be good if he stands that; I know I couldn't—I can't bear old women," replied Cecil.

"Nobody ever thought you were good," responded Hugh, "except perhaps yourself."

"I should like to preach, but I never could go to see old women," said Cecil; "and I don't think I could teach boys; I mean boys who are so stupid as they are at Sadbroke."

"Don't talk about things you don't understand, Cecil," said James.

"May I ride the colt just once, Jem?" entreated Guy.

"You ride the colt!—most certainly not. I hardly like Cecil doing it; but he sticks on like a monkey, as he is."

"There, Cecil, you hear what you are thought of now; I hope you approve of

your likeness—I do, most decidedly,” said Hugh.

Guy looked very disappointed.

“Never mind,” said his brother, “you shall have a ride at Midsummer; the colt will be steady by that time. Come in and look at him, Hugh,” he added, as he opened the stable door.

Very handsome indeed he looked, as he stood there, with his long mane and tail. His master went up to him patting him, and was evidently immediately recognised by the animal.

“He is a beauty, Jem,” said Hugh; “but I don’t think you must expect him to take to old women just at present. He would make a racer.”

Alas! Alas! for human frailty! Old Adam was too much for young Melancthon, is it to be wondered at if this same “Vecchio

Adamo" had still power over the heart of the curate of Sadbroke.

"I'll back the colt against your Night Star, Hugh," he said, "to be first over the iron fence, down the long meadow, and then over the hawthorn hedge at the end."

"Done!" cried Hugh. "My white terrier against your new riding-whip that Night Star beats the colt by a length, before we come to the hawthorn hedge."

But the curate's face lengthened considerably.

"You know I did not mean that, Hugh," he said. "I never bet now; not that I have any doubt of the colt, but I object to the whole system on principle."

"Oh! certainly not, only I wanted a riding-whip; but you will try the horses just the same, I suppose."

“Undoubtedly. I ride the colt every morning, and put it over the fences. It is perfectly quiet to ride, but not yet quite so steady as I could wish in harness.”

So the horses were saddled and led out, their owners trotting them about a little.

“Poor Night Star!” said Hugh, caressing the chestnut, “you were the beauty in the summer, and now you are thought nothing of by the side of this new upstart; but we will show him we think nothing of him, though we are not to win the riding-whip.”

They drew up their horses side by side, with difficulty restraining their impatience till the signal agreed on had been given by Cecil. Then overclearing the fence at a bound came Night Star, flying like a bird; and scarce a second later over came the

colt, bestrode by the compact figure of the curate, the animal's legs flying in a manner very different from those of the ambling pad, which *la convenance* asserts to be the proper mount for the clergy.

Neck and neck through the field went the black colt and the chestnut; but the next moment was a very critical one. They were nearing the awkward hawthorn hedge, and the colt was scarcely sufficiently broke to make such a leap a safe one. But a slightly firmer pressure of the knees, a touch of the bridle by the light but well accustomed hand, and the colt sprang safely over the fence, about half a head in advance of Night Star, whose somewhat loosely-sitting rider scarcely avoided catching one of his long legs in an overhanging bough.

Now, the hawthorn hedge was the boundary on the south side of the grounds of Fair-

leigh, and on the other side was a lane—a very unfrequented lane; and neither of the riders thought for a moment there was the slightest chance of their intruding on anything larger than perhaps a water-rat in the ditch.

But the evil genius of the curate of Sadbroke was certainly in the ascendant that morning, for as his horse alighted on the ground the first sight that met his astonished view was none other than the person of the Rev. Edward Saxon, rector of Sadbrough-cum-Sadbroke, who, together with his wife, was walking down the lane at that early hour to visit a sick parishioner.

In vain did he attempt to raise his hat, in vain did he endeavour to speak a few words of certainly not unnecessary apology, in vain did he strive to draw his rein—

the colt had been put on his mettle, and having found his first race a most delightfully exciting proceeding, was determined not to be quiet when his master desired him. Most contumaciously did he stand on his hind legs, pawing the air with his front, until the curate, as the only chance of securing his own safety as well as that of the bystanders, gave him his head, and quickly was seen going up the hill at full gallop, running away, as he himself felt, like a boy from the presence of the rector.

But utterly reprehensible as was the conduct of the colt and his clerical owner, the lawyer and Night Star proved themselves fully equal to the emergency. The beautiful, well-trained animal stood perfectly still, her arched neck still quivering with excitement, as her rider leapt lightly off,

and, with the bridle hanging on his arm, raised his cap, and approaching Mr. Saxon, very gracefully apologised for the carelessness of his brother and himself.

The lane, he said, was so little used, he feared they had almost appropriated it; but Mr. and Mrs. Saxon might rely such a thing should never happen again; and he felt sure his brother would much regret not having made his own excuses for his conduct.

Mrs. Saxon, a tall, fair, elegant-looking woman, quickly recovered her self-possession, though she owned the apparition of the two flying horses had been for the moment very startling. And the rector, with a good-humoured laugh, told Hugh he was glad they were all safe, and it was not worth saying anything more about.

“Though you’ll certainly break your

necks, some of you, one day," he added, "if you don't take a little more care; but I suppose, Hugh, it is a treat for you to be in the country again; and how long have you come to stay?"

And after a little more conversation they parted.

After about an hour's ride, James thought the colt was sufficiently quieted down to be taken home without any injury to his education; and going in as usual at the side gate, went through the court-yard up to the stable door. Here he saw Cecil lovingly caressing a large white owl, who sat winking and blinking his great round eyes in the rays of the low winter sun, to which the boy had inadvertently turned him. He looked up as his brother came in, and said—

"I knew you'd win, Jem; the colt is

so quiet now. I rode him myself yesterday, and took him over the low fence; he went beautifully. We all took the short cut, and saw you both come over the hedge; but we kept back when we saw you had run down Mr. and Mrs. Saxon."

"Where did you get that owl, Cecil?" inquired his brother, sternly, suspecting the state of the case.

"Oh! he was Guy's, you know. I bet my best pair of pouters against him that the colt would win; I knew that he was safe for it."

"But you ought not to bet, Cecil," replied his brother; "you know it is not a right thing to do—I never bet."

"Oh! no more do we, for money or anything of that sort—of course we shouldn't think of doing such a thing. I only laid

my pouters against the owl, he is such a darling old fellow, and I did want him so!" replied the boy, hugging the bird as he spoke.

This proposition of Cecil's, that to desire very ardently the possession of another, is a sufficient reason for obtaining it, even though the manner in which it is gained is not altogether a right one, would at any other time have been strongly combated by his brother. But as it is said to be the last straw that breaks the horse's back, so this small bet of his brother's seemed to cap his misdeeds of the morning; and he was just then in no humour for preaching. So dismounting, he gave the horse to the groom, with many directions as to the attention to be paid to him; and leaving Cecil feeding and petting the owl, went on through the grounds, for the

purpose of holding with himself one of those disquisitions which are so difficult to bring to a satisfactory termination.

Was it a wrong thing to have ridden the colt that morning?—and if not, was there any harm in having a race with his brother's horse? Were the gifts of a clear eye, a steady hand, and firm nerves, all bestowed on him by God to be lightly regarded, or treated as of no value? Would he not lose all these if he shut himself up all day in his study?—and should he not become dreadfully disagreeable besides. He felt sure he should. Was it not his duty to improve all his advantages?—might they not become of use, of incalculable use, even to him, in his holy profession?

So he went on, asking himself question after question of this kind: what recreation

was allowable and what was not?—how far must he refrain from all enjoyment, and in what might he indulge?—questions the like of which, to many of us—that is, to those of us who ever think at all—are continually recurring; questions that have nothing to do with the one broad rule of right and wrong, for which there is no answer in the Scriptures of truth; and questions, therefore, which each must answer for himself, and himself alone, as in the sight of God, and according to the ability which God giveth. But for all those who, like the curate of Sadbroke, have set before themselves one high and holy aim, these minor things will become daily of less and less importance, merging gradually, yet surely, into the one great purpose to which they have dedicated their lives and souls, and which will shine

ever brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

So, after some time spent in this self-consultation, without arriving at any definite conclusion with respect to the matter then under consideration, but with very decided advantage to himself, as regarded his ever-deepening determination of living henceforth no longer to himself, but unto Him whose servant he especially was, James Knightly retraced his steps to the house, and entered the drawing-room. Here he found the ubiquitous Cecil now relating the account of the morning's adventure. Throwing himself into an attitude which he intended to represent that of Mrs. Saxon, when the horses came so astonishingly over the hedge; he addressed his conversation to his mother, by saying,

“And she reared, mamma, right up!—

Mrs. Saxon reared just like Jem's colt! I wish you could have seen them both!"

"My dear James," said his mother as he came in, "I wish you would be more careful. I am so sorry you have frightened Mrs. Saxon."

"What are you talking of, Cecil?" said their father; "what is all this about the colt? You don't mean to say, Jem, that you took that young horse over the hedge?—it was positively unsafe; and you should have looked to see whether anyone was coming. Do pray remember you are no longer a boy—you must endeavour to re-collect your position as a clergyman."

But the day was not yet over. A few friends were coming to dinner, and amongst them Mr. and Mrs. Saxon. James spoke to them immediately on their arrival, apologising with great frankness, for what he

not untruly called his unwarrantable conduct; and very cordially was his explanation received, though with the assurance it was altogether unnecessary, his brother having said far more than was required in the morning. However, after dinner, when the ladies had retired, the rector drew his chair near to his curate, deeming it his duty to give him a little friendly expostulation with regard to his conduct.

“I am really quite glad to see you safe here this evening, Knightly,” he began; “but although I know you do not like to hear it, I must say, I really think you are hardly justified in risking, in the manner you do, so valuable a life as yours is become.”

Now, it happened that this doctrine of useful lives—a very favourite one with the Reverend Edward Saxon—ran directly

counter to an equally favourite theory of the Reverend James Knightly's.

"I am sure, my dear sir," he replied, "I feel greatly flattered at the very favourable opinion you have of me, and very much pleased that you should take any interest at all in me; but really you must forgive me, but I cannot see that my life is at all more useful than that of any other man who endeavours to do his duty."

"Your groom's, for instance," said the rector, drily.

"Exactly," replied the curate; "I consider, myself, the horse is perfectly safe now for a child to ride; but taking your view of the case, if I do not ride him, it will be the duty of the under-groom to take him out for exercise, a young man in whom I take the greatest interest, and who is

the chief support of his poor mother, and who, I really trust, may prove a great blessing to all with whom he comes in contact."

"But you surely allow that, as a clergyman, your influence extends through a much larger sphere, and that therefore you have far greater opportunities for usefulness than a man in a lower position of life."

"My responsibilities are much greater," he replied very gravely; "none can have a deeper, I may say, a more painful sense of that, than I have myself; but I believe God has placed every man in the place He sees most suited to him; and it is only in another world that we shall ever know which of us has been most instrumental in setting forth His glory, and in furthering the good of our fellow-men."

The rector could not but remember how, a few short months before, the said groom had bid fair to turn out one of the wildest young men in Sadborough, and how it was undoubtedly through the instrumentality of his argumentative curate, that he now bid fair to become, as James had truly said, a blessing to all around him; but he only said—

“Well, I have nothing more to say, except that it would deeply grieve me if by any accident I should lose so useful a curate; though perhaps it might tend to my own personal quietness, with respect to parish matters, had I a less zealous coadjutor—eh, Knightly?”

And the rector laughed, a little low laugh, at his own joke. James Knightly was naturally very far from a vain man, but that half hour's self-communing in the morning

had made him just then especially humble. So he said, with real true feeling,

“I cannot think, my dear sir, I was in any danger whatever; but if anything had happened to me this morning, I am quite sure you would have found no difficulty in finding a man far more fitted than I am, in every respect, to fulfil the duties of so holy a calling; and perhaps,” he added, with a slight smile, “he might have no fancy for training a colt.”

So, happily for all parties, without any accident, was concluded this little episode in the career of the black colt; but the story was not soon forgotten by the rector of Sadborough, who would frequently relate it, when, as was his wont, he was recounting the good deeds of the curate of Sadbrooke.



CHAPTER V.

A RAY OF LIGHT IN SUN COURT.

ABOUT the same time that, according to the last chapter of this most veritable chronicle, James and Hugh Knightly were conducting themselves in a manner that, had they been less fortunate than they were in escaping Mr. and Mrs. Saxon, might have fairly laid them open to a charge of manslaughter, Maude Wilmot might have been seen picking her way as carefully as she could through the mud of Fivefinger Street; then, turning into Duck Lane, she

spoke a word to Nanny Martin, who was standing at the door, and promising to call on her return; she was finally lost sight of in Sun Court.

A fair vision anywhere, a wonderfully fair vision at that part of the world, was Maude. But how was she dressed? says the reader. Well, that is a trying, a very trying question for the uninitiated; how shall it be answered? She certainly wore no crinoline—they were not in use thirty years ago; her hair was not done up in a small cabbage-net made of chenille; she did not wear a shade hat, or a turban hat, or a red feather, or a grebe plume—and that is about all the information I can give my fair reader. But Sally Martin told her sister Suky that evening all the young lady wore, from the bow on her bonnet to the shoes or boots on her

little feet; but then her perceptions were quickened by the hope that, as Maude had once given her something, she might have a reversionary interest, in part, of the property in question—an idea which gave many an anxious thought, like all doubtful hopes regarding future wealth, to the mind of Sally. Her hair not having as yet been turned up—an expression in use at the time to which this story relates—hung in long, sweeping, curling masses, like pale gold, almost down to her slender waist. It was a very fair face that looked up from under the bonnet, with a world of love and thought in the blue eyes, far more than she herself had as yet any idea of, more probably than she would ever know; for Maude's would be the common woman's lot, to live in the life of another, the joy of the house, the delight of every heart, and shedding that

joy and that light as unconsciously as the bright luminary who now sent a few blessed beams up Duck Lane, though even he could not penetrate into Sun Court.

Maude went in at the open door of a house. There were two steps down; it felt very damp and chill, coming in out of the fresh air. A large family lived in the lower rooms; the man was a shoemaker, a rough, fearful-looking man, with wild, fierce eyes; he always frightened Maude. They were dirty, slatternly people on the first floor—altogether she did not much like coming to this house, but her mission was to the occupant of the attic at the top.

She went up two flights of steep stairs, the last flight almost a ladder, and emerged through a trap door, entering by this means into the room at the top of the house.

It was a decent room enough, of fair size, and clean and tidy-looking—a great contrast, in this respect, to the rest of the house. The occupant was a widow woman, of the name of Brown, who, with a little occasional help from the parish, contrived to keep herself, and her only son, in tolerable comfort, by continual work at the braiding, as the making the nets was called. There was a large net on the floor, some skeins of twine on the table, and also the queer-looking needles, and little short round sticks used for the work.

The woman worked extremely quick; Maude was accustomed to see it done in this way, but it was always a wonder to her how it was managed, it took her so much longer to do a little purse—they were not done in crochet thirty years ago—than it did Widow Brown to braid a large net.

“How are you to-day, Mrs. Brown?” she inquired.

“Well, Miss Maude, the rheumatics be terrible bad. I did just get out a bit yesterday, and I’m none the better for that same, and they stairs be most too much for me to manage.”

“I’m very sorry to hear you are so poorly,” said Maude. “Mamma has got some things left from the old people’s dinner yesterday, and she sent me to say there is your share for you, if you are well enough to come up to our house, if not you can send Jem.”

“I’ll come myself, I reckon ; I s’pose I can do that—I must. ’Tain’t much I gets by staying at home, they who goes about gets the things, they who stops at home gets nought.”

Maude thought this hard, as she had come

into this region that morning principally to see Widow Brown, and offer her this beef and pudding. She thought she would change the subject.

“Has your son any work now, Mrs. Brown?” she inquired.

“Not a bit o’t—nobody gives he work; there’s they as gets everything, they who don’t want it; they who do, never has none.”

Maude knew that Mr. Gain always kept Widow Brown employed, even when work was slack. She was a good worker—that might be the cause; or, as is sometimes the case, charity and interest might, by his so doing, walk together pleasantly hand-in-hand.

Mr. Gain had a talent for putting out his money well. Fivefinger Street and Duck Lane being well looked after, paid him fair interest. Now, as he had much goods laid

up for many years, sufficient for himself and his family, would it be wrong, he sometimes thought, to lay up some small treasure in heaven. He could not afford to tie up much money so very tight, but the time might come when the investment—adventure, he was rather inclined to call it—might prove to have been a profitable one. At all events, he would employ Widow Brown; he felt sure, in pious phraseology, it would be returned to him. So, although work was slack that winter, there was plenty of twine given out to Widow Brown, and she was not justified in saying that she was forgotten.

“Was not Jem working for Farmer Stewart at Sadbroke?” asked Maude.

“Yes, he were; he be out now, he turned him off, I dunno for why. He’s to go to school soon; the parson a-heerd he was out o’ work, and came arter he.”

“It was very kind of Mr. Saxon,” said Maude.

“’Tweren’t Mr. Saxon, ’twere Parson Knightly; he knew as we was going to Sadbroke, and he’s in want of boys for his new school.”

“Going to Sadbroke!” said Maude, astonished.

She had never known Widow Brown anywhere but in Sun Court, and she could not understand it.

“Yes, we be a-going. Sun Court’s bad for the rheumatiz, and I’ve got a brother to Sadbroke, who be well off, and he’ve got a cottage; and ’twill be some un to speak to—I don’t make no neighbours here.”

“You will be able to keep on the braid-ing just the same, I suppose?” asked her visitor.

“Oh! yes; I can walk well enough wi’ a stick, and when I can’t come in myself, Jem can come for me; Mr. Gain will keep me my work.”

Maude was not fond of Mrs. Brown, but she wished to be as polite as possible, and therefore said—

“If you can do for a little while without Jem’s work, it will be a great thing for him to get a little schooling.”

“Yes, I s’pose ’twill do he good, or I shouldn’t ’a ’greed to his going; but I hope if he goes reg’lar the parson will pay him a bit, to make up for the loss; perhaps you’ll speak just a word for him, Miss Maude.”

The last sentence was spoken in a much more pleasant tone of voice than she had used previously. She was looking full at Maude, and perhaps was a little softened

at the sight of the pretty figure that stood before her, or perhaps she thought such a pleader must soften the parson. Maude pitied the woman's ignorance, but had some small share of sympathy left for James Knightly. She replied—

“Mamma said at four o'clock, if you can come. Good morning, Mrs. Brown.”

Widow Brown made a parting curtsy to her visitor, smoothing down her beautifully clean checked apron as she did so; but after she left muttered to herself—

“That be the way o' them. They tells us when to come, and then they tells us to go, and we be to take what they gi'es, and then to say as we likes it.”

But she certainly did like it. Mrs. Wilmot always gave away what was good, as none knew better than Widow Brown.

So punctually at four o'clock she arrived at her door, and received a plentiful supply.

Maude went downstairs, passing the slatternly family and the fearful-looking man, who looked up from his work, and gave a sort of growl, as she passed the room where he was sitting at work. She was very glad to be out of Mrs. Brown's awful presence, and, turning out of Sun Court, went into the Martins' cottage. Nanny met her at the door, and, in reply to her inquiries after Tom, said,

“Very pla—in, Miss Maude, terribly pla—in, thankee. Mr. Mills have a been to see him. Mr. Knightly told him how bad he was. Parson Knightly often comes to see Tom—he said as Mr. Saxon had axed him.”

Maude knew this, James Knightly had

told her so, and it was he who had asked her to go to the Martins'. It happened in this way. About a fortnight before James Knightly set off one morning to go to Sadbroke. He had a trying day before him ; he was going to call on the farmers, and expected to find them impracticable. Reformers have always difficulties to meet with—they must expect opposition. The new curate of Sadbroke thought the place terribly behind the rest of the world in every respect, pitiably so with regard to the best knowledge of all. But there are two sides to every cause, the farmers thought.

“The parson be very young, 'twon't do to give way to he ; new-fangled notions never did go down at Sadbroke, and never wouldn't.”

So on the morning in question, with the

thought of these visits before him, James Knightly started for Sadbroke, and at the corner of a street in Sadbrough turned suddenly on Maude Wilmot.

Very much as a person feels who on a cold wintry day all at once finds himself in a gleam of bright sunshine, did the curate feel in the presence of Maude. He basked in the golden gleam, he enjoyed himself extremely, but the interview was drawing to an end, and still he shrank from going out of the charmed circle in which he was standing, to again encounter the chill beyond. But just then an idea struck him, by which he could both lengthen the conversation for a minute or two, and also by sending the cheering ray in the direction he chose for it, in some measure appropriate it to himself as his own property. He therefore told her of

poor Tom Martin, and described the place and the people, saying they were very respectable though they were poor, and that as he had been very much engaged of late and had not been able to go there, it would be such a real comfort to him if she would go instead and supply his place. Maude's cheeks flushed, and her blue eyes fell beneath his glance. They had always been so much together like brother and sister, that it was nothing to them either to ask or receive any little service that the other could grant; but James Knightly had never before asked her to see any poor person for him, and it was something very new and delightful to think that while he was busy working she could be really useful to him.

“I am going home,” she said, “and I’ll ask mamma; but I am quite sure she’ll

let me, and I'll go down directly—that is, if you don't think they'll mind me," she added; for Maude, like many people who have not visited much amongst the poor, was rather shy of going to see strangers.

"I'm quite sure they'll like to see you extremely, Maude," said the curate emphatically; and then he walked lingeringly away.

But for the next mile he quite forgot the farmers, and allowed his mind's eye to bring before him a picture of the little house in Duck Lane, with a very fair ray of light just then falling on the unaccustomed face of poor Tom.

Maude had been several times since to the Martins, and was quite at home with them, and Tom looked forward to her visits with the greatest pleasure.

It was something only just to sit and look

at her, she was so different from any person he had ever seen before; and when she sat down and talked and read to him, and sometimes sang him a hymn, was it any wonder that he scarcely thought she was a creature of this world—she certainly did not belong to his world of Duck Lane.

She went in and his eyes brightened.

“I am so glad to see you, Miss Maude!” he said.

She took his thin hand in hers; it was hot and feverish.

“You are not well to-day, Tom, I am afraid?” she asked.

“No, Miss Maude, I feel terrible weak. I try to get out a little in the sun, but I can’t walk now without a stick. I wonder whether I shall ever get any better?”

She did not know herself, but she had

heard James Knightly say there was no chance of his doing so, and she would not use any deceit towards him. She said timidly—

“God knows what is best for us all, Tom; I should be very glad if you did not suffer so much; there is no pain, no suffering in Heaven.”

She was almost afraid she had said too much, but the poor rarely mind speaking of death, before those whose time is very short, and Tom was so used to it, the way she put it sounded very pleasant to him.

“No, Miss Maude, I often think that when I lie here of nights. I look out o’ window at the stars, and think it mayn’t be long afore I be up among ’em. They do look so quiet and bright like, they makes me feel quiet too.”

It was a child's way of putting it, but who has not felt the wonderful sense of calm produced in the mind by contemplating these glorious orbs, which, set in order by the Hand of the Eternal, ages and ages since, have rolled on in their clear beauty until now?

"Please sing," said Tom.

She sang the Christmas hymn, "Hark, the herald angels sing!"

"I thought of the angels last night," said the boy. "I sometimes think I hear them; I shall very soon, Miss Maude. I'm not afraid to die now. I was once, but Mr. Knightly have told me of the Lord Jesus saying—'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Those who come to Him, means those who love Him and trust Him—isn't it so, Miss Maude?"

“Yes,” she replied, softly.

She could not talk as Tom did, she was not so near the eternal world.

“Shall I sing your favourite?” she inquired.

“Oh! please, yes!” he replied.

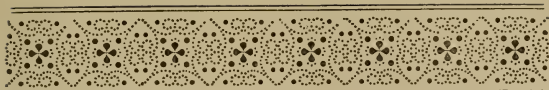
It was that pretty one—“There is a land of pure delight.”

The boy listened to it almost entranced. He was but a poor child, he only lived in Duck Lane, but was he not then standing like Moses on the top of Pisgah, looking over into the promised land?

“I will come again very soon,” said Maude.

And the ray of light vanished from Sun Court and Duck Lane.





CHAPTER VI.

THE VILLAGE OF SADBROOKE.

WHEN, six months before the time that this story commences, James Knightly was appointed to his first curacy of Sadbroke, he found the place in what he called a truly deplorable condition. It had been the custom to have but one full service in the church on Sunday; in the afternoon there were only prayers. There was no school, the children were expected to go to that at Sadborough. Some did so, some were taught by a lame woman

who worked hard all the time at the braiding, and the greater part attended no seminary for learning whatever. There had been very little visiting the sick, no real caring for the people in any way. There were a few doles, that had belonged to the poor from time immemorial. A dozen twopenny loaves were placed every Sunday afternoon on a shelf under the reading-desk. These were given away after service for the use of old people over seventy, and were called Robinson's bread. Then at Christmas there was Williamson's charity, for those who did not receive from the parish, strictly tied down to Church people. Johnson's charity for those who did receive parish relief—the recipients of this charity to be selected by respectable householders ; and Thompson's charity (high honour to the memory of

Thompson) for all who needed it, be they who they might, as far as the money would go. The curate superintended the bestowment of these benefactions, and, except in very special cases, they were all the people had to look to.

The inhabitants of Sadbroke were brought to the font in infancy to be baptized; when the time came, they stood before the altar to be married; and when taken away by death, the prayers of Holy Mother Church (a phrase which has come more into vogue, however, since those days) were read over them. But fearfully had the mother neglected her duty, and the were riotous children at Sadbroke. Their forefathers had bequeathed them a church—they had bestowed on themselves two chapels. The church was a small, venerable-looking building, with narrow latticed

windows deeply set in the thick walls, some quaint carvings of heads round the Gothic arch of the door, and a tower, mantled to the very top with a thick drapery of ivy. It stood on somewhat high ground, overlooking the village, and looked as though it would fain have blessed the people if it might.

Of the two chapels, one was very small, but very handsome, and was intended to be a tiny, but, as far as possible (under the difficult circumstances of the case), correct representation of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. It had facings and columns of Portland stone, and must have cost a large sum of money. It had been built by a wealthy gentleman of the neighbourhood, who scarcely lived to see it completed. There was an appointed preacher to this chapel, a man of some in-

telleet and fair education ; but his creed was a cold and lifeless one. I much doubt whether, had his been the doctrines preached, it would have needed the interference of the town-clerk to still the riot at Ephesus.

The other chapel was at the further end of the village. Some people said it was built in defiance of all the rules of architecture ; but no one had ever intended to be defiant—they had simply never thought of any rules. It kept out the cold and snow of winter, and the sun and thunder showers of summer ; there was no danger of its falling in and crushing the people, as some such chapels have done, and this was the most that could be said of it. Yet it was not without ornament. Two Corinthian pillars supported a flat porch, round the top of which ran

a mosaic carving. There was a clock over the door, and the flat roof was hidden by a battlement. There was no regular minister to this chapel—the services were conducted alternately by a travelling tinker, a carpenter of a neighbouring village, and a factory foreman from Sadborough. Yet even the curate was, after a time, obliged to allow that it was wonderful how large an amount of Scripture knowledge some of these people possessed, and what a facility many of them had in expressing it.

The chapel had not been built many years. The people belonging to the sect previously met in a cottage. As there was no distinctive feature to mark the cottage from those around it, a paper was wafered in one of the small panes of the window to this effect:—"The everlasting Gospel is preached here every Sun-

day and Wednesday evening, at seven o'clock." I have seen people very angry at a paper like that.

With respect to the congregations at these different places of worship, all the farmers, a few people of the class of retired tradesmen, who had pretty cottages at Sadbroke—one or two of the small shopkeepers—the better class of the poor, that is, those who did not receive parish relief, together with all those in the parish over seventy, with scarcely an exception attended the services of the church. We must hope the old people sought higher food than Robinson's bread. A few gentlemen's families who lived near, together with some of the retired tradespeople, and a few of the better-educated among the farmers' sons—though these latter were only occasional visitors—entered suitably

attired beneath the portico of the epitome of the Temple of Diana. The greater number of the small shopkeepers, a great number of the poor, and all the farm-servants, went to the brick chapel, to benefit by the alternate ministrations of the tinker, the carpenter, and the factory foreman.

Sadbrooke was a very pretty little village—so thoroughly rustic. The Sad, here considerably narrowed since leaving the town, gave great additional beauty to the place. The village was distant about two miles from Sadborough. The road, after leaving the town, went inland, up a gentle ascent for about a mile and a half. A lane, with a finger-post marked to Sadbrooke, then turned to the right. From the top of the hill the view was beautiful. Southward was the sea, with the

harbour of Sadport in sight; and far to the north stretched a boggy moor, purple in Autumn with the coloured heath. The little village, nestling in a hollow between the hills, was principally built along the banks of the river; though a few farm-houses and small cottages, surrounded with trees, were dotted around at various parts of the landscape.

From this point the winding of the Sad could be traced for miles, from where it ran out into the sea at the harbour, or where it washed the convent walls, then where it rippled through the village; till, gazing far away, the traveller almost fancied he could discover the brook amid the heather at the little hamlet of Holywell, whence it took its rise.

The lane out of the high road went with very little winding, and very few ups

and downs, for about a quarter of a mile, when, just before entering the village, it dipped suddenly. The hill, though short, was a very precipitous one; though it had probably at some time been still higher, as the church stood quite on a bank above the road, on the left side, with a raised causeway and steps up to it, by which you might reach the little wicket-gate that opened into the churchyard.

On the opposite side of the lane was a farm-house, with hay and corn stacks at the back. From one point on the top of the hill the appearance was exactly as if the road led straight into the Sad, so completely did it seem to flow across the bottom of the lane. But passing the church and the farm, the visitor would find the river took a sudden turn to the left, and the road turned a sharp corner to the right,

before coming quite to the bottom of the hill, going in front of the farm-house. It was a sort of terrace road just here, having been cut high to avoid the overflowing of the water; and a row of white palings were placed to prevent any danger to carriages. A little further on this road was the Temple of Diana, looking very much, in this close proximity to the hay-ricks, as if, like the image of the goddess herself, it had fallen down from Jupiter. Further on were some very pretty little houses, with gardens before them, looking very gay and picturesque in summer, with their bright flowers and rows of bee-hives.

When there was mourning in a family, a bunch of crape was tied round the bee-hive. Whatever might be neglected, old superstitions were rigidly adhered to at Sadbroke. But if, instead of taking this road to the right,

the traveller continued his way down the hill, he would have come to a stone bridge, ivy-covered like the church, which lay so in the hollow it could be scarcely discerned from the top of the road. It was very narrow, and unusually steep, the dip on the other side being so sudden, and the turn of the road to the left by the low bank of the river so extremely sharp, that a stranger driving in that place might have found himself immersed in the Sad before he thought he was well over the bridge.

“It was a nasty bit of road for certain,” was said of it; “but folks should mind how they drives.”

There had been an accident at this corner once. A farmer returning from market on a very dark night ran the wheel of his cart against the corner of the bridge, and, being thrown out by the shock, his head

struck against the wall, and he was killed on the spot. There was great commiseration for himself and his bereaved family felt among the neighbours, but there was no idea of altering the turn of the road.

“He should have had a lantern by right,” said one.

“His missis should have sent a boy out wi’ a light. That’s what I always does,” said another.

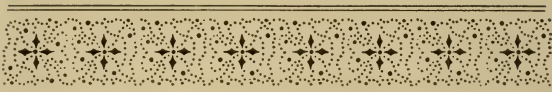
Standing on this bridge was seen the prettiest view of the church, the high ground on which it was placed giving additional height to the ivy-covered tower, and the grey stones with many-coloured lichens growing between them shewed from this point to full perfection.

There was a cottage or two on the other side of the bridge, their walls washed by the waters of the Sad. One of these was

vacant when James Knightly first came to Sadbroke; it was afterwards inhabited by Widow Brown. Sadbroke has been described as it was at the time of this story, in many things it is changed, but many others are unaltered. From the top of the hill the blue sea may still be seen stretching out to the far horizon, and the vessels still sail in and out of the harbour of Sadport. The Sad still winds its tortuous course, meandering amid the undulating hills from the distant spot where fancy pictures its heathery home at Holywell, onward, past villages and fields to where it joins its waters with those of the deep sea. But the down has been in great part inclosed, and, instead of the yellow gorse that formerly shone in the spring sunlight, may now be seen the green blade of the young corn, and, instead of purple heather bells,

the autumn breeze now sways backwards and forwards large tracts of waving yellow corn. The village itself is altered; there is a new bridge, and, though the turn is still steep, it is no longer dangerous. The hill, also, has been cut down; it is still steep, but the ascent is far less precipitous. There have been other changes; the place is altogether greatly improved, though not more picturesque than it was formerly. There are many pretty villages in England, the land of quiet home scenes, but it would be difficult to find one more truly English than the little village of Sadbroke.





CHAPTER VII.

THE RECTOR AND CURATE.

IN the last chapter an attempt was made to describe the village of Sadbrooke, and also the state in which it was found by James Knightly. But any attempt to describe the condition of the curate's mind respecting it would be wholly fruitless. He attempted to introduce one or two reforms, innovations, they would have been called, had the people been equal to using the expression. Some of these fell to the ground—others, like the sermon in the afternoon,

were allowed, because they could not be prevented. There having been no sermon was the reason previously alleged by a great many of the congregation for not attending in the afternoon; the length of the service, now there was one, was adduced as the cause of so many remaining away.

“The parson meant well,” said the farmers, “they’d nought to say agin him, but there wasn’t no going to sleep in comfort like now; and if a body did catch off for a minute, he wor sure to wake up wi’ a start like.”

So they preferred spending their afternoons by their own firesides.

One thing he had done. By giving a small salary to the woman who kept the little school, he induced her to leave off braiding in the morning, and to give her

undivided attention to her scholars. He found her by no means incapable, and he thought, with some instruction from himself, this school would do for the girls and younger children for the present, and he went about continually in the parish urging on the parents of the bigger boys the necessity of sending them to school at SADBorough.

Respecting these boys he was particularly anxious. He thought there was a much fairer chance of acting beneficially on young minds than on those who, having lived all their lives in one way, could not be expected easily to change. How to manage a school for them was his constant thought; and, at last, determining to leave nothing untried to effect his object, he came to a resolution that, six weeks before this story opens, sent him one morning rather early

to the rectory, to seek an interview with Mr. Saxon.

A very pretty gable-built house was the rectory, standing in its own grounds.

James Knightly was shown into the rector's study, who, in reply to his apologies for intruding on him, greeted him kindly, saying,

“Always happy to see you, Knightly.”

But the words did not slip off his tongue altogether with ease, for he had just written the text for next Sunday's sermon—“Speak every man truth to his neighbour;” and the real truth was that he always felt sure a private interview with his curate meant something that would go far to disturb the quiet peace of mind which verily the rector's soul loved.

The study was a pleasant room at the back of the house, with a large window

looking over a lawn, in which were shrubs and flower-beds; a fine row of elms shaded the room on the right, and the blue sea glanced among the branches about half a mile distant. At some little distance was the harbour of Sadport, with the masts and sails of the vessels full in view. It was very pretty to see their white sails catch the glow of the sunlight as they sailed in and out, dancing in summer merrily over the water, and an anxious thing during a winter's gale to watch some frail barque, and to know that the lives of all on board depended on their reaching that harbour ere the waning sun shut the view of it from their sight.

A very pleasant room was the study—a pleasant room to read in, or to write in, or to study in, or to meditate in, or (shall it be written?) to doze in. There

was a writing-table, covered with books and pamphlets, papers on parish matters, club-tickets, notes for manuscript-sermons, and like matters. There was also a very comfortable-looking arm-chair in the study, with a foot-stool before it.

The curate opened the conversation by saying :

“I am come to speak to you, Mr. Saxon, about Sadbroke, and to ask your advice as to the best means for endeavouring to effect some reform among the people?”

“Why, what’s going wrong there, now, Knightly?” asked the rector. “I have been quite comfortable respecting Sadbroke of late ; and, from what I hear as to the manner in which the church fills, I think you should, indeed, be most thankful for the measure of success God has vouchsafed to your ministry.”

“It is respecting the school that I wanted to speak to you,” was the reply. “I find it is almost useless to endeavour to get the children to Sadborough; and the boys are so very riotous, I feel sure there will be some mischief unless something is speedily done for their benefit.”

Now the rector knew quite as well as his curate that a school was needed at Sadbroke, but whenever the thought would come intrusively into his mind, he hushed it to sleep, and rocked it as lovingly as possible.

“If the means could be provided, of course I should be very pleased to see a school established; but as I do not see any manner of procuring the requisite funds, I think you must be satisfied with trusting to God to impress upon the people the truths which I am quite sure you put before them from the pulpit.”

“My purpose in coming this morning, Mr. Saxon, was simply to say, that, with your permission, I will undertake the thing myself.”

The rector had known his curate from a child; he took almost a father's pride in him, but it made him say pretty much what he liked to him.

“What! turn schoolmaster yourself, eh, Knightly? That will be hard work in addition to the two sermons every week.”

“I have not the slightest intention of turning schoolmaster myself—certainly not to boys in their class of life.”

“Then you trust to the farmers to assist you, I suppose? Well, Knightly, you are the most enthusiastic fellow I ever knew!” said the rector.

Now, to tell a man who is working very earnestly and practically he is enthusiastic,

for no other reason than because he is young, or because he is truly endeavouring to act up to what he considers right, is very much like saying that, in the matter in question, the speaker regards him as a fool. At least, this was the sense in which it was understood by the curate of SADBROOKE.

“I know you think me very young and very foolish,” he replied; “enthusiastic, you call it, but I am not sufficiently so to rely in any way on the farmers—at least, not at present. I will undertake the expense of the school myself.”

But the rector had been irritated; he had not yet done with the system called by the doctors counter-irritation.

“When I last saw you it was an organ you were so anxious about,” said he.

“I certainly must own that those bar-

barous instruments in use in the church do worry me intensely ; but I am so sure the school is a real necessity, that I feel I ought not for a moment to allow my own dislike to bad music to stand in the way of the advantage of these poor boys."

As has been noticed, Mr. Saxon was very fond of his young curate ; he had acceded to the proposition respecting the organ at once ; the Knightlys were sufficiently wealthy for him to have no scruples of conscience about the matter ; it would be a decided improvement to the church, and if James liked to stint himself in pocket-money for a time, it would do him no real harm. But this offer of giving up a thing which he really wished, and without a thought that he was thereby doing anything particularly good, fairly won the rector's heart.

“Let us talk the matter over quietly, James,” he said. “It was a very liberal offer of yours to give a small organ to the church, and as there appeared no difficulty about getting it played, I was quite willing to accede to the proposal; but this is a different thing—it will be a constant drag to you, and, out of your small stipend of eighty pounds a year, is really more than I think you ought to give.”

“I can do it very well,” he replied. “I am too busy to spend money—I have not even taken out a game certificate this year; and I did think of going back to town with Hugh for a week or two, if you could have spared me, but now I have got interested about the school, I should not like to leave; so you see how very economical it is to be busy!”

“I am very glad you find it so,” said

the rector, laughing; "still it will not do to build this tower without first counting the cost. What do you calculate will be the expense for a master?"

"I knew a man whom I can get for twenty-five pounds a year, who, I think, will do very well, with my superintendence; he wishes to improve himself, and will gladly come for that sum; and there is a room, I believe they built it for another chapel, but have never used it, that I can have for a mere trifle."

"What do you call a trifle?" inquired Mr. Saxon.

"Five pounds a year—not more, certainly."

"Then there are coals, candles, books, and slates," said the cautious rector.

"I have thought of all that; the expenses will not exceed forty pounds the

first year, and will be less afterwards."

"I shall make no further objection whatever," replied the rector, "and only regret I cannot help you; but the Sadborough school is a great drag to me. I think, however, you should certainly call on the neighbouring gentry, and on the more wealthy of the farmers; it is their duty to help in the matter, and they should certainly be asked."

"I should much prefer doing it by myself."

"I have no doubt you would; but we must sometimes all of us do things we do not like; and I certainly think they should be asked."

"I will call on them, as you think so, but have very little hope of gaining any benefit by so doing," said James, and the interview ended.

Mr. Saxon remained some little time in thought; he could not expect to keep such a man as his present curate very long at Sadbroke, and it would be scarcely likely that another would be willing, or, indeed, able to assist much with the school. But he knew it was really needed, and there was a way in which he could manage about the funds. Although he had required his curate to ask for subscriptions, it was a thing he never thought of doing himself; and the consequence of this was, that the subscriptions to the school at Sadborough were so small, that the handsome sum with which he headed the list was a merely nominal one, the greater part of the expenses being paid out of his own pocket.

Still the Sadborough people were quite able to maintain their own school; and as

the rector was greatly respected, any appeal from him was sure to be liberally responded to. He was well aware of this; he much preferred at any time giving himself, to asking others to give; but if he was really obliged to request subscriptions for the Sadborough school, he felt sure he should receive enough to free himself from a burden, and leave him a sufficiency to maintain the one at SADBROOKE.

At all events, for the present, his energetic curate would take all difficulties off his hands, so he resumed his sermon, with the thought there was no need to meet troubles half way.

James went on pondering the interview over in his mind; he had disliked going very much, and now he thought how foolish he had been to have had any fear

respecting it. How very kind Mr. Saxon had been, and acceded to his wishes almost immediately. What a very even-tempered man he was!—he wished he was so himself. Mr. Saxon always implied he would be just as quiet as himself when he came to his age. He did not altogether feel that he wished to be so—he hoped he should always think the same on many points as he did at present, and do his utmost for the advancement of his people, wherever his lot might lead him.

There was something sad in the idea that, as years went on, he should become cold and indifferent; he trusted earnestly it would never be so; but at the same time, perhaps Mr. Saxon was right in saying he was enthusiastic—he did not like being called so—he considered himself very

practical. Well, the only way he could show that it was not enthusiasm by which he was guided, but a real earnest purpose, was not to be turned aside lightly from the task he had set himself. He did not think he was likely to grow tired, but he must expect to meet with disappointments, and it was as well he should know what people thought was his fault, because then he could guard against it. But was the entering with zeal into a good work any reason why it should not last? He thought not.

Then there was another point; he was so very hasty-tempered—he had been so near answering Mr. Saxon very sharply, and that would not only have been very wrong, but would perhaps have prevented his rector giving his sanction to the proposal—for he did think him a little ob-

stinate sometimes. He was glad he had not made any quick, sarcastic reply; but it was a very difficult thing often for him not to do so. And now he had the farmers to call on—a further trial for his patience; but he thought he should not mind them much.

The first he went to was Farmer Stewart, who occupied the farm opposite the church. He was out superintending the ploughing. The curate found him there, and began talking a little about the crops.

“I called on you though, Farmer Stewart,” he said, “to tell you that I am thinking of opening a school; the children are running so wild, I consider it as very much wanted; and I come to inquire whether you will not assist me with a small subscription?”

“No—no, Mr. Knightly,” replied the

farmer, "you keep your learning to yourself. It's all very right that you should have it, but let they boys alone, they'll never be no good if you takes to teaching they."

"I cannot see, though," was the reply, "why they should not work quite as well if they knew how to read as if they do not—there is a great deal of ignorance at Sadbroke."

"I daresay you think so, parson, but you see you's but young. Why, I mind when you used to come here arter blackberries, and birds' nests, and what not; and it can't be expected as you knows so well as they as have lived more years in the world. You thinks 'twould be very fine to make scholars of 'em all, but I tell 'ee 'twill do no good; you keep to your preaching, and let they boys keep to the plough."

“I think you’ll change your mind after a time, farmer,” was the reply.

“Don’t you reckon on me changing, Mr. Knightly; and no offence, I hopes, my refusing ’ee, but let the boys alone, and take care of yourself, ’wi that fine colt o’ yourn; you have him in hand capital, to be sure, but he’s a spirity creatur.”

The farmer knew how to administer a little judicious flattery—the curate was very proud of the colt.

“He is a fine animal, and is getting very quiet,” he said.

And he forgave Farmer Stewart for reminding him of the days when he went birds nesting—it was so very long ago, he had almost forgotten it himself.

The next person he called on was a Mr. Jones. He formerly kept a small grocery and general shop at Sadborough,

but he had retired for some years. His son had taken the business, which he had very much increased, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, senior, now lived at Sadbroke.

It was a pretty little cottage enough, and, on asking for Mr. Jones, the curate was shown into a trim little parlour, with some flower-pots in the window, in which a few flowers were still in bloom. Presently Mr. Jones came in straight out of his garden, which was his great delight. He pulled off his gardening gloves, but retained possession of the pruning-knife, with which he had been very busily employed. It was his chief employment and entertainment, and very proud was he of the grapes and choice wall-fruit, which, by the care and attention he bestowed, rivalled those of his richer neighbours. He was a round, sturdy, pleasant-looking little

man, with a face like one of his own cherry-cheeked apples, beaming with good-nature and self-importance.

“Very glad to see you, sir; always happy to see my clergyman,” was his salutation.

“I’m afraid I am bringing you in from your garden, Mr. Jones.”

“Don’t you say nothing about that. I’ve plenty of time for that, and to talk a bit to you too.”

“It’s beautiful weather, is it not?” said his visitor.

“Be-au-ti-ful weather, Mr. Knightly. I’m getting on with my pruning, and I hope, if you honour me with a call when the fruit’s ripe, I shall be able to offer you as good a peach as ever you’ve got at Fairleigh; but I’ve got to do most of my work myself; not a boy to be had in the

place, if you'll believe me, sir, that I can trust to do as much as a bit of weeding ; they pull up the flowers, and won't work ; they're an ignorant set, as, I am sure, none can know better than you."

This seemed like a good opening.

"It's about that very thing I called here this morning. I am very anxious, if I can, to establish a school. Mr. Saxon and myself have been talking it over, and have decided there must be an attempt made, and I hope that yourself, and the residents at Sadbroke generally, will assist in the undertaking."

"I'm not against teaching them some things, Mr. Knightly," was the reply, "such as how to weed a garden, or anything like that, but as to book-learning, you follow the advice of one who has lived many years longer in the world than you have,

and don't you trouble yourself about teaching them boys."

He was flourishing his pruning-knife as he spoke, and gave it a sort of jerk at the conclusion of this speech, as though he would intimate the boys were of no use but to be thrown into the corner.

"I intend to open the school, I assure you, Mr. Jones, and can only say I should be very glad of your co-operation. I am anxious about the matter."

"Very com-mend-able, indeed, for a young man—a very com-mend-able thing, indeed, I can't help saying that, though I don't expect to see any good come from it, I really don't," said Mr. Jones.

The natural tendency of his disposition to see the droll side of things probably served the curate in good stead. Some men so young as he was might have felt

annoyed at this tone of patronage, and considered their dignity aggrieved, but he never troubled himself on that account, though it did cost him an effort to restrain the smile that, do what he would to prevent it, puckered the corners of his lips as he replied—

“I am glad you think it right I should try. You know as the bough is bent, so will it probably grow; and I hope I shall take at least as much pains with my school as you take with your garden.”

“Well, now, if you’re not in a hurry, I’ll tell you what comes of poor boys learning,” said Mr. Jones.

And his visitor resigned himself to listen.

“When I kept that shop, you know, in SADBROUGH, where you used to come and buy marbles—and very hard you were to

please—I had a boy once to run errands, and carry out parcels; a good sort of boy he was, and I gave him a shilling a week, and he earned it honestly enough. But he was one of that sort who want to improve, and though there were not many schools then, he did manage to learn; and I didn't much mind at first, because he could read directions, and them sort of things. But then, 'twasn't long he'd stop for a shilling a week; and he got a higher place, and now, Mr. Knightly, perhaps you don't believe me, but he's got a shop of his own now most as good as my son's; and that's what comes of teaching boys, and setting them above their betters—I don't consider it right."

"I do not think we need fear such a thing happening often, though," said the curate, the slight smile coming back to his mouth. "Boys are not in general over-

fond of learning, but I wish to teach them a little, and I hope you will find it will not injure them in any way."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see," said Mr. Jones, reflectively; "and to please you, sir, who I've known from a child, I don't mind trying one of the boys to weed again, if you wish it—I have got a waste plot to be cleared."

"Of course I shall be very glad if you employ any of them; it will be a very good thing, and you must come some day and look in at the school."

"I shan't mind doing that, and thank you for calling, Mr. Knightly, which is more than Mr. Grey did all the time he was here; and I hope to see you again at my little place, when the green-house is looking better, and that you won't forget to look in at the peaches."

Certainly James Knightly was experi-

encing the truth of the saying, that a prophet has no honour in his own country ; to have the bird-nesting and marble playing of his early days remembered in this manner was hard, but he could not see it was any reason for his giving up the school. He called at several other places, and also on some of the gentry who owned the land. He was received better by some than others, but he could see all had much the same idea of him as Mr. Saxon and Farmer Stewart—that he was young and enthusiastic. He spent three mornings at this work, and collected five pounds. It was rather a trial of patience to one who, perhaps, had not much naturally to boast of ; and he certainly was young, and perhaps rather ardent ; so, although he expected disappointment, still the many refusals fell chill. The five pounds had taken him

three mornings to collect—time enough, more than enough, to have written his sermons for the next Sunday—time enough for him to have done some amount of reading, for when he left college he determined he would not give up study. And instead of all this he had wasted—no, spent, this time in calling on uncongenial people, who had most of them been disagreeable, and getting five pounds! But what right had he to call them uncongenial?—they might not suit him in all respects, but they were those among whom his lot was cast for the present, and it was his simple duty he had been doing; he had no right to consider he had given up anything in so spending his time—it was his plain work; he could read and write of an evening, and he had managed to ride the colt an hour or two every day—people generally

do find time for what they like ; and now these visits being all paid, the next morning he would take him out in the gig. As to all that had been said, it did not sway him in the least, nor turn him one inch from his purpose ; he was determined there should be a school at Sadbroke, and if it only required a little activity and self-denial on his part, that was a mere nothing, and a week after Christmas the school was opened.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE COVEY OF PARTRIDGES.

IT was a week after Christmas, the day for opening the school. It was a fine morning, cold and frosty, but very pleasant; and Hugh said at breakfast he was going out for a day's shooting. Cecil offered to accompany him, and he asked James if he could not for once give up his other occupations and come with them. But, as he had told Mr. Saxon, he was too busy to give up any time that year to shooting, and had therefore taken out no game cer-

tificate, he thought the riding the colt would be quite exercise enough for him; and it appeared just a thing in which he could practise self-denial without injuring anyone else—not always an easy thing to effect—and he really wished to devote his time to the school. But it was self-denial, as Hugh inferred from the rather sharp manner in which he replied,

“You know I do not intend to shoot this year; I have no certificate, and am going to Sadbroke.”

“Just as you like,” said Hugh, in a cool provoking manner.

“You had better come, Jem,” said Cecil; “and just pop at the sparrows in the hedges to keep your hand in, and prevent Hugh having the best of it when next you try together.”

Now this thought had passed through

James's own mind. He by no means intended to become a hunting and shooting parson, and life was becoming too real a thing for him to be easily turned aside from his purpose; still the idea of not being able to bring down a bird when he wished, was rather a painful one, so he said, half angrily,

“It is very foolish of you, Cecil, to try and persuade me, as if I were so easily moved from my determination. I shall not fire a shot this year, and when I say a thing I intend to keep to it; but if, as I suppose, you are going my way, we can start together.”

They set off, enjoying the clear frosty air, and going on together for about a mile, when the two younger brothers turned off from the road, and the curate proceeded alone to SADBROOKE. He wondered whether any boys had gone to his school. As he drew near, he heard a loud noise, and, coming closer,

saw a troop of boys standing in the road. "Here be the parson a-comed his-self," he heard called out loudly, and they rushed off and went clattering in a most disorderly manner into the room. There was work enough for him to do here certainly; he forgot all his regrets about the shooting in a moment, and followed the boys into the scene of confusion which the school-room then presented. The master came out to meet him, a meek, quiet-looking little man. He had been a small tradesman, but had failed in business, and, having quite knowledge enough of plain things, thought he would try and commence teaching. But he knew nothing of the way to enforce order, and this morning his new duties overwhelmed him. He had been previously very anxious as to his meeting with the curate; he had heard he was very strict and particular, but when

the riotous boys of Sadbroke came trooping in with a desire to make a row if they could do so, each looking forward to the prospect with great delight, the master began to hope he should not be left to manage them alone, and yet very much afraid if Mr. Knightly came in just then, he would think the noise was his fault, and that he ought to have quieted it. But Mr. Knightly thought nothing of the sort; he expected the school to be a good deal of trouble at first, and was quite ready to make excuses for the wild spirits that were so unused to being curbed; and though he was bent on reducing them to order, he was not to be surprised by any conduct however outrageous. A few words spoken to the master in his pleasant winning manner set the poor man quite at his ease, and the business of the morning commenced. He first spoke a few words to the boys,

telling them it had grieved him to see them idling about as they did, and he had opened the school in hopes they might benefit by some instruction.

Some of them, he knew, had been to school at Sadborough; they, he hoped, would go on steadily; others had not had the same advantage, but, now it was offered them, they must do their best to improve; if they tried, he was sure they would soon get on. He trusted to their being good boys, quiet and steady, and not giving himself or the master more trouble than they could help, and he trusted God's blessing would be upon the school. He looked so grave, they were a little awed, and, with the exception of a few kicks and pushes to each other, kept quiet; but then it was only for a few minutes, they could not have done so long.

Then began an examination as to the

amount of knowledge possessed by each. It was little enough, though some could read tolerably; and when they came to be put in classes, it so happened that many of the younger boys took the top places, an arrangement which gave great dissatisfaction, which, although it was not loudly expressed, was very discernible.

But now the curate's real kindness, which, from his stern look, they hardly believed in, was discovered even by the boys themselves; he spoke so pleasantly—told them that if it had not been their own fault they were ignorant, they were not to blame; that now they might learn if they chose; they had the offer of getting on given them, and he felt sure they would do very well. And many determined to try; they liked him to speak kindly to them—and school began in earnest.

He then took the class for Bible-reading; he was very simple in his explanations, and took real pains to prevent the reading being a task; and for a little while it went on tolerably, and some of the boys appeared interested, but there were others who had come principally with the view of having some fun, and the class became very disturbed. One of these boys, Jem Brown, the only son of Widow Brown, whose acquaintance we made in Sun Court, was particularly troublesome; he was much older than the generality of the boys, and had only come now at the express desire of the curate that he would, while he was out of work, try to spend his time more profitably than in loitering about the streets. And now that he was come, James Knightly almost wished him away again, he was so turbulent, that the others who were in-

clined to be quiet, and were now somewhat frightened, were, to say the least, very inattentive; and, at last, at a ridiculous answer that was given to some simple question, the curate shut the book, saying that in their present state of mind he should not allow them to read the Scriptures.

Soon after twelve o'clock struck. There was a wild rush made, first for their caps, and then to the door.

"Come back!" was called out, in the fullest tones of the curate's deep voice, and they did not dare disobey.

They were made to leave in quieter order, and the master gave a sigh of relief at the prospect of a little peace. James talked over the conduct of the boys with him for a short time; it was much better, he said, than he expected; they had run so wild,

there would be need of great patience with them for some time ; they must be got into order, of course, but he particularly wished not to make them dislike school ; it ought to be regarded by them as an advantage offered them, and he did not wish to lose any of the boys. He was afraid Jem Brown was a bad boy ; but this was a chance for him ; he requested the master to look well after him. The man promised to do so, but said he hardly knew how he should get on alone.

“ I do not think you could, just at present,” was the reply ; “ but I have a few visits to pay in the village, and will look in during the afternoon ; and I shall come every day this week, and by the end I expect to see it in very different order.”

As he went through the street he saw a

boy who had not been at school; he inquired the reason.

“Don’t know,” was the unsatisfactory reply.

“Where do you live?” he asked.

The boy pointed out the cottage. It was a dirty, wretched-looking place, the floor actually covered with children; the mother was washing in the laziest manner possible.

“Do none of your children go to school?” he inquired.

“No, they haven’t got no clothes vitty,” was the reply.

“What they have on would do very well, if you were to wash and mend them.”

“I can’t wash no harder than I does,” said she.

“You would not have to wash so hard

if these children were out of your way, and it would be a great advantage to them."

"Say?" was asked, interrogatively.

He tried to put his meaning into plainer language.

"It would be a good thing for those children, especially for your eldest boy, to go to school. You would like him to know how to read?"

"I can't read, why for should he?" was the answer.

But after a little more conversation, she promised she would send mayhap one or two on 'em.

Going further, a decent-looking woman came out to speak to him.

"You've a-put Sam down in the lowest class, sir—it's what he don't like, nor I nother, nor none of us!"

She began by making a curtsy, and speaking very softly—rather timidly; but her courage increased as she went on, and she was quite angry by the time her short speech was finished.

“He scarcely knows his letters—he must at least learn them before he can be put in a higher class.”

“He’s up fourteen, and we’s decent folks. I don’t like for he to be kept down!”

“I have not the least wish to keep him down. I hope, as you are so anxious about his being in a higher class, he will try and get on—will you not, Sam?” said he, addressing the boy, who was hiding behind his mother.

He gave no answer, and the curate went on thinking they were really almost hopeless people at Sadbroke.

He had a few sick people to visit. From some of these he learned far more than, young as he was, he was capable of teaching, and willingly did he own that such was the case; and that, was it not for the help he received from the poor themselves, he should be quite unable to continue his work.

Then there were some old people he wished to see (recipients of Robinson's bread), of a class to whom the visit of the clergyman is chiefly agreeable, from the hope that he will not come empty-handed; and liberal as he was, almost to a fault, this sort of thing revolted his feelings extremely. Yet were these committed in some measure to his charge, and he felt, with all the earnestness of his deep nature, the responsibility that must rest on him, unless he continued

instant in and out of season preaching the Gospel.

He called in again at the school—there were but few boys present; he inquired after them at their respective homes. Some were out weeding, or watching corn; others had found half a day's schooling quite enough for them. He began to wonder whether he really should ever establish a school.

Altogether, not unlikely, in fact, from some fault in himself, this visit to the village appeared rather a failure; he felt within himself a deep yearning for better things. And how were these high aspirations pulled down by hearing naughty boys spell easy words of one or two syllables, and by reading the words of Holy Scripture to ears and hearts that seemed sealed to their true meaning.

He had quite forgotten his shooting ; but his heart was rather sad. Was he not fitted for something higher than this ? —was he never to do any real work ? The idea of a wider sphere, of missionary enterprise, of following in the steps of a Martin or a Schwartz rose visibly before his mental vision ; and forgetting that distance lends enchantment to the view, and that hearts in heathen lands are equally hard as in England, until they have received higher teaching than any that belongs to earth, and that there would be ignorant old people, and unmanageable young ones, under a burning sky as well as under a cool one, the curate began seriously to think of relinquishing Sadbroke, and going abroad as a missionary to the heathen.

He was indulging in this day-dream, and

almost settling his future destination, when he saw Hugh and Cecil in a field at some little distance from the place where he had left them in the morning, and Hugh called him to come and see how many birds he had bagged. He went in, and Hugh gave him his gun, saying—

“Just hold it for a moment, Jem. I think I hear wheels in the road down below, and I want to see whether it is my father and Hamilton returning from Chesterton.”

He gave him his gun, but had scarcely gone more than a few steps, when, bang! bang! was heard, and a brace of partridges fell dead on the field. A hand on his shoulder, a few words about his certificate, a laugh from Hugh and Cecil, and the unfortunate curate was enlightened as to the cause of his being entrusted

with the gun, just at the moment that the impatient black Fan, no longer restrained by Cecil, raised a covey of birds.

Now, to a little-minded man, one who was always thinking of his own importance, and setting himself up as an example to the rest, these ever-recurring tricks and annoyances would have become almost unbearable.

But James Knightly was one of a very different class. It is not too much to say that for one moment he was intensely angry; but it scarcely required another second to make him aware that in justice his anger ought to fall on himself rather than on his brothers. Very quietly, therefore, he commenced reloading the gun, and bending over it until he was sure every trace of anger and vexation had passed away from his face. Then handing it back

to Hugh, with his usual frank smile, he said—

“It is quite evident that I am not in any way proof against temptation. I shall have these partridges stuffed.”

And taking them from Cecil, who had picked them up, he walked away through the field.

Although a short time before he had been feeling himself too good for the people at Sadbroke, this was far from his usual estimate of himself, as his frequent speech was that he was too young and insignificant to be capable of exerting anything like influence.

One day, when Mr. Saxon entered on the subject, and assured him that the way he was working at Sadbroke was the best training he could have for a sphere of more extended influence, his reply was—

“I assure you I have no influence, or, at most, it must be very small; and I prefer it should be so. I feel sure, had I any, I should inevitably use it wrong.”

Yet, notwithstanding this idea, he had great influence in his family, and notwithstanding the partridges, that influence never stood higher with his brothers for good than it did at that moment. All the young Knightlys were sufficiently firm of purpose to be aware that it is a very trying thing for a man to be led in a thoughtless moment into doing a thing that he had previously determined not to do; and they well knew, also, that their brother was deeply, or, as they sometimes called it, ridiculously conscientious. Besides, Hugh had seen the furrow on his always rather stern brow, and the strong

compression of his lips, as he reloaded the gun ; and none knew better than he that there was a small volcano in the bosom of James Knightly, however much it was generally hidden from view.

But the great reason why, notwithstanding what they called his unnecessary strictness, their eldest brother was such a favourite with all was that he so rarely blamed any one but himself ; and let them tease him as they would, he never indulged in petty recriminations or those foolish little lecturings which do so much more harm than good. Even now, with the feeling strong upon him that he had been trapped into doing what he had made up his mind not to do, there was nothing like reproach on his lips or in his looks. There was only love in the deep clear eye that fell full on Hugh, and threw a passing glance on Cecil,

as he gave back the gun and took the birds.

Was it, then, any wonder that a character like this, of such unfeigned humility united to such lofty aspirations, had in their quieter moments acquired a power that was almost fascination over those young hearts. They followed him, with their eyes to the gate, and Hugh said—

“Jem is a downright good fellow, Cecil. I know he thinks we tempted him to do wrong, though he didn’t say so; and I suppose we did. If he stuffs those birds, as he certainly will, they ought to be hung where we could look at them too.”

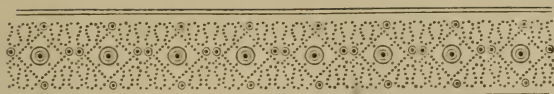
And so ended the joke, losing completely its character for being one, from the manner in which it had been taken.

The curate walked briskly over the hard ground; he wished to reach home in

time to take the colt out for a canter before dark. The unusual ideas of self-importance which had made his morning so uncomfortable were now scattered to the four winds; and as he went on he thanked God that his sphere was such a small one.

He earnestly hoped the time would come when he should be very different from what he now was; but at present it would not be right to trust him with any influence—the little he did possess he used so exceedingly wrong.





CHAPTER IX.

THE COLT IN HARNESS.

THE Wilmot girls dined that day at Fairleigh, and before leaving it was decided among the young people, including Alice and Hamilton, that they would all take a long walk the next morning; the ostensible purpose being to look at some pointer pups that Hugh was desirous to possess.

“You will come with us, James, of course?” said Hamilton.

Now, to say no to this proposal was

about the hardest task that could have fallen to the lot of the young curate; but he had promised to go to Sadbroke, and he was determined to keep his appointment. Besides, the very motive that would have induced most other men to go made him that morning keep firmly to his resolution of going the other way. He had noticed Hugh's start of admiration when, on the night of his arrival, his glance first fell on Maude Wilnot.

She had been always a very pretty girl, but, not yet eighteen, the last six months had wonderfully changed the character of her beauty. As she has been already described, however, there is no need to bring the young lady again under particular notice.

The jealous eye of the lover had watched keenly her every movement for the last week, when in Hugh's presence, and he

began to fancy she really did like talking to his brother, who, wholly guileless himself in the matter, never strove to hide the fact that he was intensely happy when he had her all to himself for a *tête-à-tête*.

So the curate thought, if Maude had not learnt to love him all the time that he had been in the habit of seeing her daily, there could be no reason why he should care for her; and it could be of no consequence whatever to him her taking a walk with his brother—indeed, it was only fair he should have his chance. And having argued himself into this state of mind, he felt quite sure that he preferred going to Sadbroke, and that he did not at all wish to join the walking party.

So the refusal of the evening was re-

peated the next morning. He had spent a somewhat wretched night, but it had not changed his resolution ; and he set off by himself to the school.

As he went on his way, his thoughts would, however, continually refer to the subject. He remembered the day, a few weeks before, when he had met Maude ; other people had thought it very cold and cheerless, but it was set down in his memory as a peculiarly bright morning. To-day was certainly fair and sunny, but he almost shivered as he went along the road. He was almost angry with Maude ; she ought to have asked him to go—he knew the time when she would have done so ; and he had not noticed the wistful look of her blue eye, as she waited to hear his reply to Hamilton.

Then he felt quite angry with himself.

Why had he not settled the matter before Hugh's return? He had felt so sure of her affection, that he had gone on from day to day living in the present, and never thinking any one could come between them. And now he thought what a fool he had been! And yet he was glad, too, there was no engagement between them—if their hearts were not turned to each other, he should not care even for Maude's hand. No, if she did not love him, so it must be. He could not make himself any different—he should learn not to care for a woman who had either no heart to bestow, or had bestowed it on another.

Then he thought again what a nice fellow Hugh was—no wonder if Maude liked him; he only just needed a purpose in life to make him everything that was excellent.

Maude (who, he had just said to himself, had no heart at all) was, he felt sure, the very girl to make him happy; and when he remembered how, till just of late, Maude used to listen to him, and hang on his words, attend to all his advice, and his plans for doing good, he thought he had certainly some influence over her, and perhaps it might re-act on Hugh. Yes, she certainly listened to him; but that was because she perhaps looked up to his position—it was not love; he was too strict in his ideas to inspire such a feeling in a young girl. He had certainly marked out a lonely path for himself, but he could not change now.

He hoped Hugh and Maude would be very happy; and for himself, after he had worked a little longer at Sadbrooke, he should go out as a missionary.

And yet all this time, oh ! foolish James Knightly, the morning's walk was little less lonely to Maude than it was to yourself.

But a school of unruly boys is no place in which to indulge a lover's reverie. There was a large attendance—more than there were on the preceding day. The school would be a success after all ! He began with the ciphering, trying to simplify it in a way the boys thought extremely difficult :

“ Now, boys,” said he, “ take the ninth line in the multiplication table ; you will find that, multiply nine as often as you will, the figures will always again add so as to become nine, or a multiple of nine—for instance, nine times three ?”

“ Twenty-seven !” shouted a boy.

“ Seven and two ?” asked the curate.

“Nine !” replied one of the boys.

“Nine times five?”

“Forty-five.”

“Five and four?”

“Ten !” screamed one boy.

“Twelve !” shouted another.

The curate looked stern ; when one little boy, quite by guess, happily suggested nine, for which he went to the top of the class, but speedily came down again.

The lesson was repeated over and over, and the same mistakes were made ; but the boys had a sort of idea they ought generally to say nine, and although this did not help much, yet, with the aid of a slate and a little patient explanation, one or two of the sharper ones got some insight into what was intended to be taught.

Then the curate went to the large black board in the centre of the room, and, with

the class around him, proceeded to draw a rough outline of the British Isles, with the opposite coast of France.

“In what country do we live?” asked the curate.

They did not know what he meant; at last one contrived to read the letters he had written very large.

“England!” he called out.

It was a lucky hit; and on being told he was right, he poked the boy next him with his elbow, and laughed, as information that it was so.

“England is divided into counties; in what county do we live?” was the next question.

The previous happy guess had upset their gravity.

“Sadbroke!” said one, with great decision, and attempted to go to the top of the class.

“Sadbroke bean’t the county, Sadborough be the county, and Sadbrooke be the chief town,” said another, pushing the first one down.

The curate was almost out of patience—they were behaving undoubtedly very ill.

“The next boy who gives such an answer shall be caned,” said he, sternly.

There were no more answers.

“The boy who does not answer when I speak shall be caned,” quoth the curate.

There were more mistakes, but not quite such outrageous ones. He had left the Scripture reading to the last, hoping the boys would be quieter; and there certainly was a much greater appearance of outward respect than the day before.

Having finished with the first class, he left them with some lessons, taking the second class, while the master put the

younger children together and endeavoured to get them into something like order. Presently the curate's practised ear caught a well-known sound. He looked up, and saw that a boy of the first class, whose back was towards him, was stooping down and looking at something between his knees. He knew it was a top spinning. He got up, went quietly behind the boy, and put his hand firmly on his shoulder. The boy started, and looked up terrified ; the top spun a little, and fell on its side.

“Stand up, Sykes,” said he. “Why did you spin that top?”

The boy said nothing, but began to cry.

“I insist on your speaking,” continued the curate.

“Plase, sir,” said the boy, blubbering,

“I didn’t a-mean to do it—I never a-thought a-doing it. I leaved my own top at home; ’twere Jem Brown as a-gied me his’n.”

A flash of something very like drollery shot from the curate’s dark eyes; it was unseen by any one, but he felt it was there. He remembered the partridges yesterday. He made the boy pick up the top and give it to him, and then sent both him and Jem Brown up to the master to be caned, and resumed his seat with the younger class.

“Do you know who made you?” was his question.

“Say?” was the inquiry of a big, stupid-looking boy.

The question was repeated.

“Don’t know.”

He told them. He tried to explain, in

the most simple way, the first truths of religion. One or two knew a little, but he had hardly expected to find so much ignorance; and these were not all of them young children—they were, many of them, big boys, but they had never been taught. They had been in the habit of spending the week round, Sundays and all, in scaring birds away from the corn, and no one had cared that they should know how to do anything else.

It was soon time to dismiss the school. He told them he expected them all to come in the afternoon; and they left much quieter than the day before.

The curate set out on his return home. Some thoughts of the walking party would still intrude, but he endeavoured to take a retrospect of what he had been doing. He thought one sharp little boy had got some clue as

to the mystery of number nine; he had not yet quite unravelled it, but when he learned the table at home, he would probably get some clearer insight into the matter.

Then several had learned that London was the capital of England, and Paris of France, and that the sea on which they saw the ships sailing when they went to Sadport was the English Channel, that divided the two countries. He thought the whole of the first class had learned that the Jews lived formerly in the land of Canaan, and he hoped one particularly bright boy had unlearned his theory that they were the old people who once lived in England, and were turned out when the Christians came in.

He had given them a text of Scripture, which he insisted they should learn perfectly,

to be repeated to him the next day ; and he earnestly hoped the time might come when the words he had put into their heads might, by higher teaching, be made to sink down into their hearts. Besides all this, he had become the possessor of three tops, four pieces of string, and about a dozen and a half marbles, all of which were now locked up in the school desk. He had sent up five boys to the master to be caned ; all of whom, with the exception of Jem Brown, had afterwards treated him with so much more respect, that he felt in future they would be his allies on the side of order.

The school was in a fair way of being reduced to a state of obedience, a matter which he felt sure the master could never have effected alone, without having expelled some of the bigger boys, a thing

he was most anxious to prevent, if possible.

On the whole, the two hours had been spent very satisfactorily, probably not the less so from the fact that, in coming at all, most truly the curate had caned himself pretty severely that morning.

Lunch was on the table when he entered the dining-room, but the walking party were not returned. They soon came in, but as they had left the Wilmot girls at their own house by the way, the room seemed nearly as empty to James as before, though there was decidedly more noise. Cecil gave him an account of their walk, and he tried to listen with what patience he could, but soon stopped him, saying he was going to put the colt into the dog-cart.

“May I go with you?” entreated Cecil.

“Not to-day. My mother did not like your going the last time, but I think very soon you may come without causing her any uneasiness. But I was going to ask you whether, as you have now had a fortnight’s entire holiday, you could not come to my study for just an hour in the day to improve your Greek.”

“I shall like to come very much, James, if the afternoon will do, just after dusk.”

“It is the only time I can give you, for I am busy this week. From four to five, will that suit?”

Cecil agreed, and went out with his brother to see the colt harnessed. Very handsome he looked with his long mane and tail, as he was led out and put into the dog-cart. Both the grooms stood at his head as James, taking the reins, jumped lightly into the trap. Collins, the under-

groom, jumped up by his side, and James desired Williams to stand aside. The colt stood still, then gave a short leap forward, and then ran back. Williams was going to his head.

“Don’t touch him, Williams,” said the curate.

The colt backed again, running the wheels against the stable-door, and then stood nearly upright. He was about to commence plunging, when Williams came up to him, and, tossing his head with a sort of frightened snort, he recognised the groom, and became quiet.

“I really think, sir, I had better lead him through the gates,” said the man.

“Perhaps you had,” was the reply, given in a rather dissatisfied tone of voice.

The colt had been in the gig three or

four times before, but was not yet used to it. He went very well while he was led, but had a way of looking round, as if everything he saw was very new to him, which was indeed the case.

When they had passed the gates, which had been previously opened, the groom let him go, and, with a plunge or two, he went off at a good pace.

The man stood for a minute or two looking admiringly after his young master.

"It's a'most a pity," he said to himself, "that he be a parson. He'd be the best whip in the county in no time, and there isn't a horse he can't ride."

They went along as unfrequented a road as they knew of, the colt going much better than when he was out before.

"He's improving greatly, Collins," said

his master; "he'll make a very steady horse."

Upon which, as if he had heard the remark, he commenced backing into a hedge. But Collins was at his head in a minute, and he was led safely out again. His next attempt was to run into a carriage full of ladies. It was the family from Woody Knoll. Mr. Mills was riding at their side. They were all talking and laughing. Perhaps the colt wished to know what it was all about, perhaps he was not accustomed to hear so much noise, but he was not allowed to make inquiries, and they passed without any accident. Indeed, there was no vice in the colt, he was only young, and rather ignorant as yet of the ways of the world. In little more than an hour he was brought safely home again, and was put into his

stable. The curate went up to his study, and at four, punctually to the minute, in came Cecil.

“I shall like reading the Testament with you in Greek very much, James,” said he. “I think people who only read it in English can know very little about it.”

“If you mean to say, Cecil, that you think your Greek, or, indeed, mine either, is capable of making a better translation than that bequeathed to us by our forefathers, I beg to differ from you.”

“But there are mistakes, James ; because you yourself have sometimes told me a word would bear a different meaning.”

“There are a few places, undoubtedly, in which the word might bear a somewhat different meaning. This, as you are doubtless aware, is often caused from the fact that the English word now bears a

somewhat different meaning from what it did at the time the translation was made ; but so excellent is our translation, and so carefully has it been looked over by both friends and foes, that every careful English reader may be aware, if he chooses, of these slight inaccuracies, which, after all, are very trifling. I prefer our English Bible to schoolboys' Greek."

"Then why do you wish me to read it?" asked Cecil.

"Because I think every man will have to give an account of his talents to the God who gave them to him, and I think it the duty of every educated man to take heed that he does not spend those talents on every other subject than on God's Word. Besides, of course there is great pleasure in reading a work in the language in which it was written ; but in all con-

troverted passages I prefer looking out the opinions of the most learned divines of different ages, and then comparing them with each other, to trusting exclusively to my own knowledge of languages, though I am endeavouring to make that as critical as possible."

"What do you call a critical knowledge of a language?"

"Comparing the original words with the same words as they are used by the best writers in the same language, and so endeavouring to gain the full meaning they are intended to convey."

"That must require a deal of learning, though?" said Cecil.

"Then follow my advice, and trust to your English Testament, as being a wonderfully correct translation, and at the same time improve yourself in Greek as

much as you can. There is nothing I hate more," continued the curate, "than to see a person vain of a little smattering of learning."

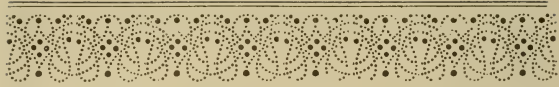
And so the week passed by. James went every day to the school; it would soon be in sufficient order to require only his occasional visits. Cecil was decidedly improving, and under his brother's tuition bade fair to become a real scholar.

The colt was becoming quite steady in harness, though his master thought it would be still some time before it would be safe to drive or ride him to SADBROOKE, and hang the reins over the school-gate.

Yet was there one going wrong; Jem Brown had got over the traces the first day; he had been kicking violently ever since, and the last day of the week the

master said he had fairly bolted, and did not intend to return any more to school.





CHAPTER X.

AN EVENING AT FAIRLEIGH.

ONE evening towards the end of the week in which James Knightly was working so hard at his school Mr. and Mrs. Saxon dined at Fairleigh, and the Wilmot girls came in the evening. Mrs. Wilmot was an invalid, and rarely went out, the party therefore only consisted of those to whom the reader has been already introduced, with the addition of Mr. Mills.

Now, as the doctor in a country town

is a person of some importance, a little description must be given of this gentleman. He was rather a short and somewhat stout man, about thirty-five years of age, standing therefore in this respect about midway between Mr. Saxon and James Knightly. He was rather a handsome man, but it was not a face of a high type; people called him pleasant and good-natured—and so he was when there was nothing particular to put him out; and as it was almost impossible to get his opinion on any subject, he escaped the difficulty of giving a wrong one. He was by no means otherwise than a clever man in a small way; willing to go wherever he was wanted, either to visit a patient or to take a hand at whist, and if he was not altogether perfect, why, very few of us, perhaps, are so; and is not the weary mill-horse round of the country practi-

tioner an excuse for many a shortcoming? A very high class of mind finding itself being drawn down, as it were, into the vortex of everyday life, would have put out instinctively antennæ in another direction; but these are few, and the irresolute mouth of Mr. Mills proved he did not belong to the class. But he worked hard, did as much good as he possibly could, and as little harm. He had no particular fault, certainly no great one—he was not great in any way, he was simply mediocre.

The gentlemen were just dropping in one after another from the dining-room, and standing with their teacups in their hands, chatting to one another. Mr. Mills first came up to Maude with a few common-place remarks respecting the weather, when, finding that Hugh was also hovering near, and wishing to do a kind act by

Maude, he crossed the room, and applied himself to the task of playing the agreeable to Alice ; but Hamilton was discussing with her the reality or non-reality of the appearance of the white lady, and likening the legend to various others, both Scotch and German, with which he appeared well acquainted ; and although the subject might have been supposed to be one of general interest, it was quite evident they were only talking for the benefit of each other. He therefore chatted a little to Annie, but with scarcely better success, for Cecil was explaining to that young lady the proper mode of training tumblers ; so Mr. Mills finally dropped into a seat by Mr. Saxon, and tried to seem perfectly satisfied to listen to his inquiries respecting sick parishioners. Mrs. Knightly and Mrs. Saxon sat together on the sofa, talking

over family matters, domestic cares, and all those many anxieties wherewith it appears to be the great delight of ladies to solace themselves.

“What a comfort, dear Mrs. Knightly,” said Mrs Saxon, “it must be to you to have your sweet family around you—such a happy Christmas for you!”

“It is indeed; though I can hardly look at them altogether as they are now without thinking of the great grief it will be when dear Alice leaves us—it will not be long, I think now; and it would be selfish to regret it, for William is quite like a son to us, and is doing so very well. I ought to think myself a very happy mother,” said Mrs. Knightly, with a sigh partly of satisfaction, and partly given at the thought of parting with her daughter.

“You will have another sweet daughter before long, if I can judge from appearances,” said her friend, glancing across the room, where Hugh’s attentions to Maude were rather of the demonstrative sort.

Mrs. Knightly followed with her eyes the direction pointed out, and did not quite seem pleased with what she saw, but she did not refer to it.

“Your girls are not old enough,” she said, “to make you anxious as to their happiness in this respect; but I cannot help thinking a great deal about Alice—the town-life will be such a change to her.”

“We must all look forward to losing our daughters—we should not wish it otherwise, dear Mrs. Knightly; and your eldest son must be such a comfort to you. Mr. Saxon thinks so highly of him; only he is

a little—just, you know, a little wild in his ideas. I suppose you know all about his school at Sadbroke? My husband could not refuse him, as he was so earnest; but he hardly approves himself of so much education amongst the poor.”

“I know James is very anxious about the school; he has been working very hard at it all the week—he is looking so tired this evening,” and his mother threw a glance at him as she spoke; “but I hardly know myself whether to think it right or not. It was only this morning that I found the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho’ in the kitchen drawer. I told James of it, but I am afraid he did not listen; besides, he says, when we have taught them to read, we must provide them with proper books. It really throws a great responsibility on mistresses!”

“We cannot expect young men to think of those things,” replied Mrs. Saxon; “but I can believe anything you tell me. I have given my housemaid warning, because I found her writing in an album, actually an album with coloured paper; though she is not a bad servant, and perhaps I may keep her, if she asks me, as I think she will; but, as you say, it is no use whatever to mention these things, except to one another; for when I named it to Mr. Saxon, he only said I had better put up with it.”

“I fear there are great trials awaiting us with respect to our domestic arrangements; indeed,” said Mrs. Knightly, “even James expects to see dinner ready every day; and how can it be done, if the girls are all reading and writing.”

“My husband thinks things will quiet

down—there is nothing like keeping quiet, he says,” said the rector’s wife, who thought very highly, as of course was her duty, of his opinion; “he has no fear whatever of the future—he feels sure that even dear James will see things differently when a few years have passed over his head—he does think so highly of him. But we cannot expect him to act as if he had the experience of Mr. Saxon; he will find the children more troublesome than he expects, and will probably soon give up the school.”

“James never gives up anything he has once taken to,” said his mother, who did not like him thought in the wrong in any respect; “and perhaps it may do good after all. I hope it will, though I cannot quite see it myself; and, indeed, Mr. Knightly thinks very much as he does

in the matter. The present time is a crisis we have to pass through, he says—it is an age of progress, and although we cannot stay the torrent, he considers it is our duty as much as we can to guide it.”

“How happy Mr. Mills has been looking lately,” said Mrs. Saxon, changing the subject.

“I thought so myself—he is a very nice man. I wonder he has never married.”

“I suppose he could not quite afford it; but I hear it is all settled now between him and Bertha Gain—it has been talked of for a long time.”

“Indeed!—which is Bertha?” asked Mrs. Knightly, who did not know much of the Gains.

“Why, the pretty, slight girl, with brown hair and eyes, who christened the

vessel in the autumn, when Mr. Gain gave the luncheon party at the port. Were not you there?"

"No—I so seldom go out. But I remember now, Mr. Knightly and Alice went."

"Mr. Gain will give all his daughters nice fortunes. It is a very good match for Mr. Mills. I am so glad he has such a happy prospect in view; he is so very kind, and has got the children so nicely through the whooping-cough."

So, leaving the ladies to that interesting subject, we will listen a little, by way of change, to the conversation of the gentlemen.

Mr. Knightly turned over the pages of the *Times*, which had come in while they were at dinner, and going up with it in his hand to where Mr. Saxon and Mr.

Mills were sitting, showed them a paragraph.

“These riots in different parts of the country are very sad, Mr. Saxon,” he said; “and this wild cry for reform is altogether very foolish. These people would be quiet enough, I firmly believe, if they were let alone—they are misled by a set of evil-minded men who wish to bring anarchy into the land. They must fail in their purpose ultimately. Still, I must own I do not like the present state of affairs—I think we ought to be prepared.”

“I hardly expect our people will trouble themselves in the matter,” said Mr. Saxon; “they know the higher classes are their friends; and myself I have no fear but what things will go on quietly enough at SADBorough.”

“I wish it may be so. What do you

think, Mr. Mills?" asked Mr. Knightly.

"Well, I think, you know—that is, as far as I can judge," said the doctor, "there is a little disaffection in the neighbourhood; but then I have not studied the subject, and it is very likely I may be wrong."

"Sorry to hear you say so," said the rector; "so much as you go about among the people, you must have good opportunities of judging. Still, I am not anxious myself—there may be a little talk and bluster, and that I imagine will be all."

"I think, as you say, our people about here do not mean any harm," replied Mr. Mills; "still, I agree with you, Mr. Knightly, there are those who mislead them, and, as far as my observation goes, I almost fear there is mischief going on."

Mr. Mills had rarely made such a decided speech as this in his life before; but he well knew the place was not very quiet, and although he did not consider it his business in any way to interfere, it relieved his conscience to have given this warning."

"We must be prepared to meet it, then," said the magistrate.

"I have very little doubt, though, notwithstanding, that the storm, even if it threatens, will pass by without doing us any harm," said the quiet rector. "What does your son think of the matter, Mr. Knightly?"

"James," said his father, "Mr. Saxon wishes to speak to you."

James roused himself from the reverie in which he appeared absorbed, and, joining the party, entered with his usual spirit into

the subject under discussion. After a little more talking, Mr. Knightly suggested a rubber, and while the table was being set out asked his son if he did not intend to join them; he had a sort of feeling that it was not altogether the thing for James to object doing whatever the rector might think right to do.

“It is no pleasure to play with me, I play so badly,” was the reply. “I have no doubt Hamilton will join.”

“It would be a little relaxation for you, I think,” said Mr. Saxon. “From what you said at dinner it seems to me you must have been working very hard for some days at Sadbroke.”

“I assure you cards are no relaxation to me,” replied the curate. “When I was a child I remember I used to play commerce for sugar plums. I disliked the

cards, but I liked the sugar plums—I must have been a thorough little gambler, I only cared for the stakes.”

“You certainly play very badly, James,” said his father; “but you could play better, I feel sure, if you chose to take any trouble in the matter.”

“I really think myself it is exercising unnecessary self-denial to refuse oneself the pleasure of a quiet rubber,” said the rector. “I really think, James, it would do you good.”

“I am sure, my dear sir, if you are alluding to me, I fear I never exercise anything like self-denial with respect to what I really like,” said the curate.

He thought of the colt and the partridges. Mr. Saxon remembered the organ and the game certificate, and arrived at a different conclusion.

“Hamilton, you play, of course?” said Mr. Knightly.

Hamilton had been watching the setting out of the table, and had resigned himself to what he saw was his inevitable fate; it was rather hard that evening, at any other time he would have liked a game well enough.

“Then James is not wanted at all,” said his father; “we are four without him.”

So they cut for partners—Mr. Saxon and Hamilton against Mr. Knightly and the doctor.

Mr. Knightly and the rector played good steady games; Hamilton played a first-rate game—he did everything he undertook in thoroughly good style; and the doctor held his cards as best he could, and did his best. He studied Hoyle,

the authority in those days. He did not revoke, he did not trump his partner's trick, he knew there was some mysterious value connected with the thirteenth card; he tried to attend to all the regular rules, and as all perseverance is rewarded in the end, was decidedly improving.

James had spoken truly when he said he did not like cards; but, besides that, he did not wish to play. Now, although Mr. Saxon felt quite sure that in a few years he would sober down, and enjoy a quiet rubber as much as he did himself, yet it is an undoubted fact that his curate's continual refusal to play was "the little rift within the lute," which, until he got well-interested in his game, made the music of the cutting and shuffling of the cards less agreeable to him than it would otherwise have been.

As music would have been too noisy, the others sat down to a round game. Maude would far rather not have played, but as, with the exception of Mrs. Saxon and Mrs. Knightly, who were still deeply engaged in conversation, James was the only one who did not, she could not very well sit out; so Hugh placed her chair next his, and helped to make her hand for her, and talked for both. Alice, too, looked more often to the whist-table than was for the benefit of her own game, besides disturbing Hamilton, who was once called to order by Mr. Knightly, but afterwards gave his undivided attention to the game, and was rewarded by the remark from the rector,

“Your play won us the trick, Hamilton.”

Altogether the evening was hardly a

success, though few found there was anything going wrong.

After the gentlemen left, Mr. Knightly said,

“What an excellent steady game Mr. Saxon plays, Hamilton; and don’t you think Mr. Mills improves greatly? He is such a good man, too; and he plays very well, does the doctor!”

“Where’s James?” said Hamilton, not liking to contradict.

“Oh, John called him out a long time ago,” said Cecil.

Maude knew he had been absent nearly two hours, but no one else had missed him.

Mr. Knightly rang the bell and inquired.

“There is a fire at Sadbrooke, sir,” said the man. “Mr. James is gone over; you can see it from the garden.”

They all went out to look. There was a light on the distant sky, the flames were shooting up into the heavens. They had been speaking of evil, but never thought it was so near.





CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE AT SADBROOKE.

WHEN James refused to join the whist party, he was seized on by the young people at the other table to take a hand at *vingt-et-un*; but this he also declined, and sat at a little distance, holding a book in his hand, and glancing over its pages. After a little while, however, his eyes wandered; his thoughts were not sufficiently disengaged to take in the meaning, his fingers relaxed their grasp, and the book fell on his knee.

It was not otherwise than a pretty sight,

that circle of young faces, in the first spring-time of their youth, with life opening before them, an unwritten book, which none of them could look into, and yet one which they were all anxious to read; so alike in all looking forward to some ideal, so unlike in character, hopes, and aspirations.

The light from the wax candles in the chandelier threw a soft bright gleam upon the table. Alice, with the masses of her black hair strained off her face, twined in braids round her classically-shaped head, and fastened at the side with one white rose, looked almost queenly; but though her constant glances to the side-table showed the exquisite turn of her head and neck to full perfection, it gave her the appearance of being somewhat *distract*.

Opposite to her, and in full view of

the curate, sat Maude. She was in the habit of tying up her golden tresses with a band of ribbon or velvet; it was a question often discussed among them all, whether she looked best in black velvet or blue. James preferred the blue—it matched, he said, the colour of her eyes, which certainly were as bright and clear as the blue sky, and which he was wont to say were heavenly.

Hugh's opinion was in favour of the black—it gave, he said, more character to her face; that evening she wore the blue. James found himself, after his book had fallen, some minutes, without intending it, gazing at her intently. He was certainly fascinated by the sight, though he was by no means sure it was a pleasant one to him; for, as Hugh was very anxious to instruct her, the golden tresses were ever and anon sweeping so close

to him, that James began to feel looking on almost unbearable, though, sooth to say, there was rather a weary shade on that young face, too, and almost a pout sometimes on the very pretty mouth. Once or twice he took up his book again; but it would not do; involuntarily it again fell, and he was looking at the scene before him. He started from a sort of reverie when the man-servant came up to him, and said a boy from Sadbrooke wished to speak to him. He rose, and went out of the room. For one moment he thought Maude looked up at him with almost a reproachful glance; but it must have been his fancy—what had he done to vex her? He had kept out of her way—not interfered at all between her and Hugh, and what could she want more? He went out to speak to the boy.

“What do you want?” he inquired.

“Please, sir, there be a fire to Farmer Stuart’s,” said he; “I’ve comed in for the ingion, and they said I’d best tell you, ’cause it bean’t far from the church, and the stacks be all a-blaze!”

He took his hat off the peg, and was going off straight for Sadbroke, when he thought, although it was rather out of his way, he had better go and look after the engine. Engines in country towns are not now always in order when they are wanted; thirty years ago they were still less likely to be got ready in time, and they were rather slow people at Sadborough.

When he reached the place where the town engine was kept, he found a crowd collected, but the door was fast shut, and though they were battering away at it, no one heard. The sound of the knocking

reverberated and echoed through empty passages, and then died away, till it was again awakened, but there was no answer. The place was evidently empty. So leaving, he went on to look after an engine that he knew was kept by an insurance company, and which he hoped to find in better order. This engine had been drawn out, but there were no horses. Some were procured from the stable of a neighbouring brewery, but the man who usually drove them was not there. He was at home, they said. He was sent for; no, he was at the "Goose and Gridiron;" they went there; he was not of much use now he was found. The messenger came back with this information. The horses were already in; another man whose duty it was to attend the engine was going to drive; but the horses were rather restive; they were unaccustomed to be out

at night, and the crowd and the lights frightened them. The man hesitated. The curate was getting very impatient.

“I will drive for you,” he said.

He took the reins, mounted in front, with the man beside him, and at a slapping pace the rumbling old engine rattled through the streets of Sadborough.

When they were clear of the town, the flames were plainly visible. The curate whipped on the horses; the farm was very near the church, happily it stood on higher ground, but the wind was high, and rather inclined to change. If it did so, the church must be in peril, and at that thought he drove on still quicker than before. He passed the usual turn. The man ventured to remind him of it.

“I am going the other way. We can partly fill the engine, and then take it up

over the bridge; it will save time, and we can place it much better."

"But the road is such a bad one, sir," the man remonstrated.

The horses were going nearly at a gallop, the engine rattling so they could hardly hear each other speak.

"My friend," was the reply, "you objected to drive yourself, and I offered to do your work for you, and this is the road I intend to take."

The man did not dare to say anything more, but he had to hold on to keep his seat. They had turned into the lane, and were come to the steep of the hill. Here he pulled up, and went down very slowly and steadily, and then he stopped the horses to fill the engine at the low bank of the river by Widow Brown's cottage. Jem was standing by.

“Go on, Jem,” said he, “and tell the people to stand aside. I shall bring the engine quick up over the steep pitch.”

The boy did not move.

“Do you hear what I say?”

He loitered slowly on over the bridge, standing upon it directly in the way.

“Mind what you’re about; don’t stand there,” he heard called after him.

Some of the men at the farm had heard the engine, and came down.

“Keep by the horses’ heads,” said James Knightly; “I doubt their standing the fire and the noise; keep by the side, when I’m over the bridge, and unfasten directly I stop at the farm, or sooner if they begin to plunge; don’t let us have the engine over the bank.”

“Had you not better get down, sir,” said a man, recognizing him (it was his

schoolmaster), “and let us lead up the horses?”

“No, you could not take them round; only be ready, and as quick as possible.”

A strange unearthly light had fallen on the old grey church, looking really fearful as it shone on the ivy-mantled tower. The flames were shooting up from the farm, and the crackling of the fire was plainly to be heard; but James knew that until they turned it would not burst in all its fearfulness upon their sight, and he felt sure the horses would not bear it a moment. But it was no time for delay; he flogged them on; he knew almost to an inch the sweep to allow for the turn, he had driven there so often for practice. Jem Brown had to make a dash to get over the narrow bridge—they were upon him before he was aware; the men ran by

the horses' heads, the curate flogged them on, they rushed violently up the steep, swept round the other curve, and in scarcely more than a minute the engine was safely placed on the terrace road, directly in front of the raging flames.

The men had the horses unfastened almost before they stopped. It was not an instant too soon, they were beginning to plunge, and had the engine backed, it would have run against the white palings, and, heavy as it was, inevitably have broken through, and toppled over the steep bank down into the river.

It was an awful sight, coming so suddenly upon the full blaze. Four or five large ricks were on fire, the flames rising up amid the spiral wreaths of smoke into the sky. One or two were burning out, the fire having done its worst; the

house had just caught—being thatched, there was little hope now of saving it. The scene of confusion was something almost impossible to describe. The furniture was being dragged wildly out of the house, plates and dishes being thrown out of the windows; a neighbour was leading off the sleepy, frightened little ones, the terrified horses were plunging as they were led out of the yard, pigs were screaming with terror, cocks and hens fluttering about, everybody was in the way of everybody else; some of the cows were standing still, and others butting with their horns; and pieces of thatch, carried by the winds, were scarcely to be distinguished from the flocks of pigeons, which, burned out of their dovecot, were flying in the air, many of them with their wings on fire, carrying destruction as they went, till,

overpowered, they fell down like moths into the flames.

The only creature who seemed to have retained anything like his self-possession was Watch, the large farmyard-dog, who had undertaken of his own accord the charge of three sheep, and with great difficulty, and unwearied patience, had driven them through the crowded barton amid the cows, the pigs, and the terrified people, and, just as the engine came up, had succeeded in getting them out at the other gate of the farm, that opened into the lane opposite the church, where, leaving them to feed, if they liked, in the hedge, he returned to assist.

There appeared to be all the people of the place collected, but they were doing little good. Some were standing with their hands in their pockets, not attempting to

be of any use, seeming, when they were asked to do anything, really unwilling to assist; others were desirous to help, but did not know the way—and, indeed, until the engine arrived, there was little they could do, such power had the flames over the combustible materials with which they were working their will.

The hose of the engine was turned on immediately, and a large jet of water kept playing on the house; and seeing that there was now some chance of part being saved, those who had been previously willing to work, but disheartened by the extent of the fire, now assisted much more earnestly, and many of the others were ashamed to be seen by the parson doing nothing.

But a new danger was now seen. The wind had been high all day, but variable,

blowing in gusts, and occasionally changing, but for the last half hour it had set steadily in a direction that blew the flames away from the church, and along the road, past the white palings.

“The chapel will be burnt for certain, if it ain’t looked to,” said one of the men.

It was indeed in the greatest danger; the flames were blowing over it, and the lead of the roof was rapidly beginning to melt. The hose of the engine was altered so as to play on it, and after about an hour’s hard work the fire was evidently under control. But, alas! that was in great measure because there was little more left to burn! The roof of the farmhouse had fallen in, leaving only the blackened walls standing. All the ricks were gone, with the exception of one that stood at

the other end of the yard ; the stables were burnt, the barns were almost destroyed ; it was a scene of wreck and ruin. The chapel was safe—a great comfort ; for had that caught the greater part of the village would in all probability have been destroyed.

The engine continued playing ; the agent for the insurance company to which it belonged had come over from Sadborough. He had been spending the evening at a friend's house, but came immediately he was aware of the disaster.

He thanked Mr. Knightly for his promptitude ; the men were so incapable when left to themselves.

“ I am afraid I have not done much good,” was the reply ; “ the destruction is nearly total—it is a sad loss for Farmer Stuart.”

“You have saved the village, Mr. Knightly. Had the chapel caught, the thatched cottages beyond must have inevitably been sacrificed, and I do not think it could possibly have resisted the flames five minutes longer; as it is, I fear the beautiful little building is sadly blackened and disfigured—it is a grievous pity!”

Hamilton and Hugh, together with Cecil, came up just after this; they had walked over as soon as they heard of the fire.

“What a fearful scene!” exclaimed Hamilton.

“How did it happen?” inquired Hugh.

His brother shook his head.

“It will be most strictly inquired into to-morrow,” said the agent.

“’Twere done of purpose, for sartain,” said a farmer who stood near; “two ricks

was on fire to once, and they've found a bit o' a tinder-box."

The Knightlys soon left; there were now plenty of people there whose business and interest it was to see that the flames did not again burst out. Of course the village would be carefully watched all night, for fear any stray sparks might have fallen anywhere unheeded; but the fire was burning itself out. It was a sad walk from that scene of destruction. What a contrast to the quiet drawing-room at Fairleigh!

As they went on they met the town engine going, making a great rattling noise, but very little progress. The driver pulled up, and inquired if they were wanted.

"You had better go and see," said Hugh. "It is no thanks to you the village is not all down; and you had better make haste.

Can't you drive a bit quicker than that?"

The man grumbled; 'twasn't his fault, and swore at the horses, flogging them, but soon allowed them to relapse into their old pace.

"What a slow set you are down here at Sadborough!" said Hugh. "If you're going to rust here all your life, Jem, I don't envy you, that's all—why, you'll soon be like that old engine. I should be good for nothing in no time."

"If from any small advantages any of us may possess we are equal to the task," said Hamilton, "we ought to endeavour to rub off some of this rust, as you call it. I am not sure but that your brother is rather to be envied than pitied—his work is so plain before him, he has quite enough to do here to prevent his rusting; though in some things

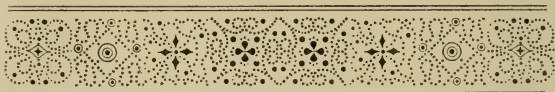
these Sadborough people seem to me to be going too fast—in the matter of this fire, for instance.”

“It all comes from the same cause—that of ignorance,” said James; “to do even a little to scatter it, would indeed be a task worthy of one much better than I am. It is little, very little I can do, but still I can do something; and I can persevere in what I have begun, which I hope will prevent my rusting, Hugh. I am very glad I opened that school.”

How often do our actions differ from our intentions! The curate drove the engine that evening to Sadbroke in the belief it was required to save the church; but in consequence of the wind settling in the contrary direction, that had never been in danger; and he laid his head on his pillow with the comfortable reflection

that he had preserved from sharing the fate of its illustrious predecessor, the beautiful epitome of the Temple of Diana.





CHAPTER XII.

A CONVERSATION.

THE morning after the fire, when Mr. Saxon's man-servant set the urn upon the breakfast-table, that functionary, who considered it part of his duty to keep his master *au courant* of what was going on in the parish, informed him there had been a dreadful fire the evening before at Sadbrooke.

“Indeed!—where was it, Jones?”

“At Farmer Stuart's, sir; the house is almost down, and a great many rickas are

burnt. He has had a dreadful loss, poor man !”

“Was he insured, have you heard?”

“The house was, sir, but that weren’t his; and so were the furniture, but that’s most saved; but the stacks weren’t, and they’re all burnt.”

“How dreadfully stupid!” said Mrs. Saxon; “how could they be so careless not to insure, and then to take no care about fire?”

“It was set on fire, ma’am, they say—done by some one on purpose.”

“I am deeply grieved to hear it,” said the rector; “I hope it was an accident?”

“They say not, sir,” replied the man; “and ’twould have been much worse hadn’t it been for Mr. Knightly, who drove the engine over himself; there was no one there fit to do anything, and it only

came just in time to save that beautiful chapel that's there, you know, sir."

This was a piece of information. As to driving the engine, that was nothing; he would, as he one day told one of them, never have been surprised to see any of the Knightlys driving a young elephant, or perhaps a pair of wild tigers, had such things come in their way; but for a clergyman to save a dissenting chapel, was a matter he thought that to an ignorant person required an apology, or at least explanation.

"I am very much distressed at what you tell me, Jones," said his master; "but Mr. Knightly has set us all a most excellent example—we should always look upon our neighbour's property, when it is in danger, exactly as if it belonged to ourselves."

Placed in this juxtaposition by Mr. Saxon, ourselves and our neighbours always meant church people and dissenters.

“Certainly, sir,” said the man, respectfully, as he withdrew.

Now, he had entered that room with the full belief Mr. Knightly was a hero; and that to have stayed those destructive flames in any way must have been doing a real duty; but if this explanation was required, there must be some doubt as to the matter. When, therefore, he was again able to collect the audience who, in the kitchen of the rectory, listened to his words with reverence, believing him to be the exponent of his master’s views, he informed them—

“He was himself particular partial always to young Mr. Knightly (though he didn’t think he quite preached equal to

Mr. Saxon), but he did hope he wouldn't be led away by these schemes of reformation that was upsetting of the country so; and he was not quite sure himself, for all people praised him so for what he had done, whether it was quite right for the dignity of the Church to have put itself out of the way to encourage of dissent."

Mrs. Saxon had somewhat the same ideas, for, as she handed her husband his morning cup of tea, she said—

"Really, my dear, James Knightly is getting so wild; I am quite afraid he will do something very foolish. That school of his was such a ridiculous scheme; and to think of his leaving home last evening, when there was such a pleasant party, and going over to Sadbroke. I am afraid he will get quite monastic in his views.!"

“Never mind James, Fanny,” said the rector, sipping his tea; “I don’t see but what he was quite as usefully employed last evening as any of us, and I have no objection whatever to his school—I think it was wanted; not that I believe in this fire having been done on purpose. I have no doubt, when it comes to be inquired into, it will prove to have been quite accidental!”

When, after breakfast, Mrs. Saxon had her usual interview with her cook, she gave great directions respecting care with the fires and candles.

“And mind, cook,” she said, “you don’t allow any low people to hang about the house as it gets dark; and tell Jones the same; they are all so rude and ignorant, they do mischief, I really believe, without meaning it.”

The fire was of course the subject at Fairleigh that morning.

“I am greatly concerned to hear what you tell me,” said Mr. Knightly; “I shall ride over to Sadbroke immediately after breakfast; the matter must be most strictly investigated, and if Farmer Stuart has really been a great loser, I shall endeavour to open a subscription for him at once; not only for the sake of assisting a worthy man in distress, but also because it is right that the disaffected classes should be made aware that those who by the possession of property are liable to be injured in this manner, intend to stand by one another at this crisis.”

“It was an uncommonly funny thing, though, Jem,” said Cecil, “that you should have gone over to take care of the church, and ended by saving the chapel.”

“You must really now do something for the fellows at the brick place,” said Hugh, “or they will be jealous of such a polite attention having been shown to the rival house.”

“I highly approve of James’s conduct,” said their father; “such acts as his of last evening tend to induce good feeling in a place; it is not because a man has taken holy orders that he is thereby released from the obligation that devolves on us all of assisting in times of danger and difficulty. It was a scandalous thing that there should be no person ready to take over the engine. I shall see to that matter at once, that such a thing may never be required again, though I earnestly trust we may have no more fires.”

“What did you think of the conduct of the people last night, James?” asked Hamilton.

“I did not like it at all,” was the reply; “but I saw some faces I did not recognise, and many who belonged to the lowest part of the town here. The Sadbroke people worked tolerably well, I thought; but many of them are very ignorant, and likely to be led into mischief on that account.”

“I heard a man say—‘Serve him right!’” said Cecil; “he didn’t see me, I was on the other side of the wall. There was a knot of them together, and they were almost ready to cheer when the roof fell in, but the man who spoke stopped them.”

James was listening to what Cecil said. He had been too much among the people not to be aware that a very uncomfortable state of feeling existed; but then he considered the farmers hard; he knew

wages were low and bread dear ; and although he had no idea for a moment of excusing any wrong-doing, he was more ready than the others to see that the way had been preparing for some time for such deeds, and that, in fact, this fire was only a small burst, shewing what was pent up. He did hope the act had not been perpetrated by anyone of the place, still it could never have occurred had they not been indulging in some measure in the evil feeling that was around them. The demons of ignorance and obstinacy had, he knew only too well, resting places in the homes of the people at Sadbroke. It was his duty, his work, to scare them from their abodes. How was it to be done ? How is all evil to be expelled ? How is all darkness to be chased away ? Surely by the entering in of light.

And was it not for him to diffuse that light, to let it shine in all his teaching, in all his sermons, in every act and every word?

His thoughts for the next few minutes were gone far beyond the fire of the evening before. Even that was but a small thing in comparison. He was thinking whence all this sprung, of the continued, the never-ceasing conflict between truth and error, between good and evil, between light and darkness, between the Holy One whose dwelling is the Eternal Heaven, and the Prince of the Powers of Hell beneath. His conversation with Hamilton as they walked together to the village was tinged with these thoughts.

“It is a very solemn thought for a man to believe that he is any way placed as the instructor of others, Hamilton,” he

said ; “ but when we look on him as set to teach those things that pertain to the Eternal World, it becomes more solemn still. I cannot wish I had never entered the Church, but I do feel very intensely how unfit I am for the work.”

“ Every man who sets himself earnestly to his work must feel that in some measure, I believe,” was the reply ; “ and of course the higher the aim the more likely are we to fall short of it.”

“ There is so much darkness around, so much sin, so much evil, so few to combat it. What I do is such a mere nothing ; and there is one thing that puzzles me not a little. I do not, of course, like the people going so much to chapel ; and yet if it is God’s truth that they are taught there, am I right in advising them to stay away ? I mean, of course, that

brick chapel to which the poor people go just in turn with going to church. I do not mean the other, that I look on as different."

"I believe the preaching at those places often suits the poor very well indeed; it might not suit you or me, but I have no doubt when you preach you are often shooting over the heads of your congregation. The remarks, the similes, the applications made by those in their own class of life, who see things from the same stand-point, must often be more appropriate."

"I have often thought that, and try to be as plain as I can, and endeavour to put myself in the position of the poor, and to think with their thoughts, but still I know it must be a different thing."

"I can see no reason why those whose

views are alike in the main points should not agree to differ in the minor ones."

"Is that not a dangerous doctrine, Hamilton?"

"Not if you confine it to minor differences, and do not allow it to affect real truth. I suppose you allow it is truth that is preached there, though the language may be poor, and there may be slight differences?"

"I believe so—that is, in the main there is no important wrong teaching; but how strange it is there should be so many different sects!"

"By no means; constituted as the mind of man is, it would be marvellous indeed were it not so. Truth may be likened to the light; in itself it is perfectly pure, but it may be divided into colours, as truth into different doctrines; and in this

division each individual mind has some particular colour which he especially admires, some pet theory, some favourite doctrine, excellent in itself, but, from being put too much forward, altering the whole ; and from this cause arise sects, each, of course, in some measure imperfect, or the light would not be coloured ; but who shall dare say their own is the one perfection, their law that whose division of colours will alone resolve into the pure light."

"Then the more we gaze at the covenant-bow the more shall we understand the proportion which each doctrine bears in the one scheme ; the more we gaze at the clear light, the deeper will be our appreciation of its purity."

He mused a little.

"I believe you are right. I like your simile, Hamilton."

“Then apply it to the different sects. One mind sees one doctrine more clearly than another, and gives to it an undue proportion; others follow, their attention having been called to that particular point they think it of main importance, and in this manner a sect arises. Another class of mind takes another doctrine, and, unduly elevating that, gets other followers; and we have an opposite party, each sees the other is wrong, but their eyes are blinded to the fact that they are also gazing only on one point. But any light, even though it be coloured by entering through a glass darkly, is surely welcome to the captive in the dungeon? Accept any help to scatter the darkness, James; one ray of light is better than none at all.”

“Undoubtedly, truth, as you say, is one; rightly to divide that word of truth,

is to separate each doctrine, giving each its own right place. The neglect of this—the tendency, as you say, of the human mind to exalt one at the expense of another—is the cause of sects, there is no doubt of that; these sects are necessarily imperfect—their bow, with all its beauty, will not resolve into the pure light. I see this plainly, and I think, therefore, it behoves all, instead of blaming others because their light is not pure, to see that their own is; but unless, from long living in the darkness, it hath, indeed, blinded our eyes, we should welcome any ray, the smallest, the most obscured; it will clear the more we watch for it; but the darkness must be pierced, it hangs over us like a shroud.”

“It is being pierced, no effort is altogether unavailing. But to return to our

argument. We both belong to the Church of England, and, of course, consider her views the right ones; let us see whether we are justified in this belief. Her articles have been framed by learned and careful men, who have duly weighed the value of each, and have, I believe, as far as possible, given to each its due preponderance; therefore, as it bears less the stamp of the individual mind than those sects which, named after any particular person, are tinged with their peculiar ideas; so it has less of colour, and approaches nearer to the pure light."

"But these sects all refer to the Bible as their standard of faith."

"That does not affect the argument. The Bible contains the truth, which is the pure light; in the dividing of it comes the difficulty; each sect or party, resting on

one doctrine or passage more than another, falls into error. Each truth must be weighed carefully as they are separated, and unless they will again unite in the one whole, there has been something wrong in the division."

"And that division, undertaken in our own wisdom, must inevitably be false; it needs the teaching of the Spirit, guiding into all truth. Perhaps we none of us seek that as we ought; we rest on our own unaided opinions, our own biassed ideas, and then, with these previously-formed views strong within us, ask teaching."

"There have been holy men, James, in perhaps every sect. They have not been left to darkness, they have seen light—more than that, they have helped to shed it abroad; but had they looked more steadily at the one whole, or, as you say, had they,

with less prejudiced hearts, sought higher teaching, the light would have been purer still; but if you mourn over the darkness, do not refuse any teaching that is light, though it may not be altogether perfect."

"Then what do you say of the boasted unity of the Church of Rome?"

"Simply that it is a boast! How can a church that, having set up one universal bishop, whom she calls God's vicegerent on earth, yet looks back to a time when two popes, upheld by different powers, struggled for the mastery, ever talk of unity? The higher the pretension, the more noticeable the least flaw; and this alone is sufficient to do away with the boast for ever. The succession of the church failed then, if it ever existed before. Besides, how can she talk

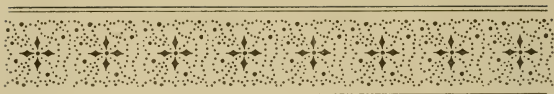
of unity, having within her fold two such orders as the Dominicans and Franciscans, whose rancorous disputes and petty squabbles equal those of the most ranting Antinomians and self-seeking Arminians?"

"Yet they do not separate."

"Which shows plainly, I take it, the immense latitude she allows for different opinions, as long as the disputants do not actually break away. The Church of Rome has presented to the world in all ages a picture of outward conformity and inward confusion. It has been her weakness that has obliged her to resort, in the way she has ever done, to persecution to induce conformity; she knows well the rottenness of her superstructure, with all its fair show, and adopts means for establishing her views, that go far to deprive her of the name of Christian. Apply to her our simile:

instead of seeking the light, of drawing nearer to it herself, she attempted to chain it, that it might not be diffused; but it vanished at the touch of the earthly, and she has little left her but the chain. All who attempt to hide light from others will find their efforts of no avail, though she will leave themselves to the empire of darkness. Let us remember that it is so—light so evanescent, so pure, flies at the approach of an earthly coil; but for those who clear her way, aiding to extricate her from clouds and mists, she becomes clearer and clearer, ever shining on in her own purity.”

“Brighter and brighter unto the perfect day,” said the curate; and he gave himself no further concern as to the brick chapel. Any ray of light, so that it was light, better than the darkness!



CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW VISITOR AT FAIRLEIGH.

AFTER returning from Sadbrooke, James Knightly was sitting in his study, when the servant came in, bringing him a card. It was a small gentleman's card, printed in the fashion of the day—just such a one as he would have sent in himself; no difference whatever, with the exception of the name—that engraved on this was the Rev. W. Marks. Mr. Marks was the minister of the handsome little dissenting chapel at Sadbrooke. James

knew very little of him, for he had come there during the time he was at college, and on his return he had not desired the acquaintance; so, although he just knew who he was when he met him, that was all, and he had never yet spoken to him.

“Show Mr. Marks in,” he said. The gentleman entered—a slight, pale, intellectual-looking man, a few years older than himself. James Knightly was going to receive him with a bow; he was rather annoyed at the visit, and with himself for having been the cause of its being paid; but the other stepped forward, and, holding out his hand, said, “I trust, Mr. Knightly, that you will pardon what you perhaps consider the liberty I have taken in calling upon you; but although I am quite aware that under other circumstances it would not have rested with me to be

the first to seek an acquaintance, yet I cannot allow a day to pass without calling to thank you for the great, I may say inestimable, service you have rendered me in saving that beautiful little chapel at Sadbroke from the destructive element, which, but for your courage and promptitude, would, last aight, have carried all before it."

"Pray take a seat, Mr. Marks," was the reply. "I really do not deserve any thanks. When I heard there was a fire at Sadbroke, my thoughts at first naturally reverted to the church, and also I would, of course, have done anything in my power to assist my people in such an emergency. I only regret I could do so very little; it has been a sad business!"

"I believe our chapel stood as a little bulwark, if I may use the expression, be-

tween the flames and the remainder of the village; so that, in some sense, although I was not present myself, which I greatly regret, may I not say we co-operated to save the place from destruction, though I sadly fear the people hardly deserved your disinterested efforts, if it be indeed true what I have heard respecting the origin of the fire."

This was the easiest part of the speech to answer; the curate did not desire to co-operate with Mr. Marks.

"I much fear, indeed," he said, "that it was the work of an incendiary; indeed there appears to be no doubt whatever that such was the case; but I still hope it was not done by any of my people at Sadbroke."

"You are indefatigable in your efforts for raising the tone of feeling, and en-

deavouring to elevate the moral condition of the village, Mr. Knightly, but I believe men of your age cannot help seeing there is a change at hand. The old bigotry is dying out, from its ashes will arise a higher creed, and sects, and minor differences, will, I believe, ere long, be as nothing in the minds of educated men, who, acting in a wider field, but in the same noble manner as you did last night, will aid each other in their efforts after good, without regarding whether it be church or chapel that is doing the excellent work."

The curate did not wish for a discussion on theological subjects; he knew they should differ; he doubted his power of convincing Mr. Marks, and as he had called, he wished, of course, the visit to be a friendly one.

"No person can desire more earnestly than I do," he replied, "the improvement

of the people ; but I seek something more than mere moral elevation or intellectual improvement. I doubt the power of its doing the work ; the light that clears the mists of darkness must be from heaven itself."

"Of course, the intellect is God's gift, and will, rightly instructed, clear the darkness. We are both endeavouring to raise these dull intellects, why should we not work together ? I am sure your school is an excellent thing, and will be productive of much good."

"I trust it may ; but if any good does come, it will be from higher teaching than mine. I can only sow the seed, and look to the Spirit to give the increase ; I can ask for the blessing, I cannot bestow it myself."

Mr. Marks looked upon this as very

unrealistic, he felt himself quite equal to scatter any darkness that came in his way, that is, if it were really worth while to instruct such low people, though he would not dispute that matter; but he began to feel that, had the brick chapel been the one saved, there would have been more sympathy of feeling between the curate and the tinker, in some respects, than there was between James and himself, gentlemen and educated men as they both were.

“You are going the way to bring it down; *laborare est orare*,” he said.

“I can take my part in the great struggle, that which is ever going on between light and darkness, between good and evil.”

“Between Ormuzd and Ahrimanes,” said Mr. Marks.

“Yes, if you will—it is the one work

of life; but we had need see well on which side we are standing. I feel it needs great care."

"And of course you think I am wrong, Mr. Knightly. Well, I can only repeat my thanks, and express a desire we may yet be drawn nearer to one another, and work together at Sadbroke."

"Most earnestly do I desire the same thing," said James; "but it must be when we can both point to the same articles of faith as those in which we believe. I have no doubt you think me very bigoted, when I say I cannot desire the Church should lower her standard of faith sufficiently to work with those who differ on what she considers main points. As to others, let them work, and welcome for me—there is room enough for all; but still I can sympathise with those

who differ conscientiously. And now we have met, we need not, I trust, in future, look on each other as strangers."

He hardly knew what he said. To one with his strong views on doctrinal points, the visit was certainly an awkward one; but he had not sought it himself, circumstances had brought it on him; and although he fully intended to decline any offer of working together, was he justified in refusing Mr. Mark's overtures to a merely slight personal acquaintance?

They talked a little on other matters. Mr. Marks, somewhat thrown out of society by his position, had seldom spent so pleasant a half hour, notwithstanding what he decidedly called the bigotry of the young clergyman. When he rose to take leave, he said—

"You need not be much afraid of me,

Mr. Knightly ; your preaching is emptying the chapel—people like something new.”

“I trust they like something better than new, even the old paths, and, I am very hopeful, I trust the day may yet come when we shall walk in them together.”

They shook hands, and the curate accompanied his visitor through the hall. The door was just being opened to admit another gentleman, who, on entering, proved to be Mr. Saxon.

Mr. Marks, brought into such close proximity, made a slight bow. The rector stood back stiffly ; being a proud man, he elevated his eyebrows ; being rather a shy one, he reddened a little, but gave no further token that he was aware of the presence of any other person than his

curate, to whom he spoke, and they went together into the drawing-room.

“I congratulate you on your new acquaintance, James,” he said, laughing; “I suppose the dissenting minister came to thank you for the kind attention you paid him in saving the chapel?”

Mr. Saxon knew his name, but would never have thought of calling him by it; to him he was simply the dissenting minister—not an individual, by any means. James was learning the lesson—one often slowly learnt—of separating the person from the class or sect to which he belongs, and of treating each as an individual, one who in the sight of God has a separate existence, and who surely ought to be allowed the same by man.

“I am rather glad, on the whole, he called,” was the reply; “he is a very

pleasant, gentlemanly man, and I suppose, as far as I am able, I ought to know everyone in Sadbroke; it may be as well, therefore, I should occasionally have a talk with Mr. Marks."

Mr. Saxon looked rather amused.

"These are new views, come quite in since my day," said he; "I consider all these fellows intruders, endeavouring to pull down the Church which is by law established, and which is the bulwark of the State. Take care you do not go too far in having anything to do with them. That is my advice, Knightly."

"I do not think I am likely to be drawn over; neither do I consider my own powers of argument would have much weight with Mr. Mark's; but as I believe the doctrines of our Church are the true ones, ought I to shrink from bringing them forward?"

Truth must prevail in the encounter with error; and though I should not have sought the acquaintance, I do not like now to shrink from it, as if I was afraid of him."

"Well, I don't suppose he will convert you any more than he would myself; only, for the sake of others, to whom our conduct is an example, I think it behoves us to be cautious how we give any countenance to intolerant bigotry on the one hand, or latitudinarian indifference on the other."

The rector spoke very kindly, as he always did when addressing his curate; yet the idea flashed across the mind of the latter in a way that almost provoked a smile—could Mr. Saxon be referring to his refusal to play whist the evening before, and going out instead and saving the dissenting chapel?

Mr. Knightly, senior, then entered the room, and the fire was again discussed, its origin so evidently the work of an incendiary. It was the first event of the sort that had yet taken place in their neighbourhood, and Mr. Knightly considered that stringent measures ought to be taken to discover the perpetrator, and prevent the occurrence of future mischief.

He had been very busy all the morning, calling on several gentlemen, and getting their names to a subscription to offer a reward, and also another to remunerate the farmer. He had called on Mr. Saxon, but had found him out, and was very glad therefore now to see him. It was decided that papers should be printed the next morning, offering a reward of fifty pounds for information that should lead to the apprehension of the person or persons who on the previous

night had set fire to the corn stacks in Farmer Stuart's barton at Sadbroke, Mr. Saxon adding his name to those who had subscribed for the reward, as well as to the list for the farmer's benefit, saying, however, as he wrote his name—

“Farmer Stuart doesn't deserve it, for having been so careless. I daresay his lantern was broken, and he wouldn't spend the money to have it mended. And as to that reward, I don't think, Mr. Knightly, notwithstanding all you say, it will ever be called for. I cannot bring myself to believe there has been any incendiary connected with it at all.”

“I wish I could think it was so,” said James; “but the people over there think very differently—I believe they consider it my fault. One man told me plainly this morning, that they had never known

such a thing happen before—that learning and fires came together to Sadbroke, and as the learning came first, he thought that was what had brought the other.”

“It was very ungrateful towards Jehu, the son of Nimshi,” said the rector; “I hear, when you left us all last evening, you took up the engine over the bridge. Was it really so, James?”

“Yes; there is plenty of room to take over a pair of horses, for those who know the turn. I don’t know that it could be done with four; but they do manage some way or other to take over the hay waggons. The bridge is not so bad as it looks; there is no real danger for those who know the road.”

“I went round that way this morning,” said his father, “and saw the mark of the wheels. As James says, there is

plenty of room. It would not do for a stranger or a bad driver to attempt it; but my boys all know the road well."

Both Mr. Knightly and Mr. Saxon were evidently proud of the feat; there was but one opinion at SADBorough, as well as at the village, that it was only the engine having been brought up at the moment it was, and so well managed, that saved the place.

"Your people ought to be very much obliged to you, I am sure," said the rector. "They have said a great deal about my going last evening, but that was a mere matter of course; they do not quite yet approve of the school. I hope in time their prejudice will be removed."

"They are a sad ignorant set, James," said his father. "I have no doubt Mr. Grey took great pains with the parish;

you must not expect to do more than those who were before you—must he, Mr. Saxon?”

“Well, he certainly works harder, and I trust he will have his reward. Mr. Grey was so unfortunate in always falling out with the dissenters, that he had not much time for anything but disputing. By-the-bye, Mr. Knightly, have you heard of your son’s new acquaintance? I met the dissenting minister here just now; he called to thank him for saving the Temple of Diana.”

“I am very glad he did so; I think it shows very good feeling on his part. I have no more sympathy than you have with dissenters myself, but I think courtesy and kindness always do more in bringing people over to our own way of thinking than the opposite course; and I have no doubt Mr. Marks, who is a very gentlemanly man, feels better disposed now to,

Church people than he ever did before in his life."

"I suppose I must go over and see this ruin at Sadbroke, and speak to Farmer Stuart," said Mr. Saxon.

"Shall I drive you?" asked the curate. "I want to take out the colt, he is very quiet now, I assure you, and we can come up over the bridge."

"Thank you, James," said the rector, with a laugh, "but I'd rather walk; though I suppose you'll look on my refusing as an affront both to yourself and the colt; but I shall look in at your school—how is it going on?"

"You must not expect to find it in great order; but it is doing fairly on the whole, I think. The master is a sensible man, though he was not at first quite up to his work; but I hope now

he is getting into the way of managing the boys, which was all that was wanted, for he was quite equal to teaching them, and I think now he sees the necessity of making himself respected. One boy, I am sorry to say, has left; his name is Brown. You know his mother, I suppose, who used to live here in Sun Court?"

"Oh! yes; Widow Brown, not a very agreeable person. Well, if you have only lost one boy, you ought to be very well satisfied—that is doing very well."

"I am afraid I am not easily satisfied; I do not like losing one. I am very anxious about that boy. I intend going over to-morrow to see his mother, and to get him back, if possible."





CHAPTER XIV.

WIDOW BROWN'S COTTAGE.

WIDOW BROWN left Sun Court, as she told Maude she intended to do, at the New Year, and established herself in the little cottage that belonged to her brother at Sadbrooke. It was certainly far more cheerful and pleasant than her room at Sun Court. The window looked across the road upon a pretty green hedge that, when spring came, would be covered with primroses. It was also a very comfortable cottage, though laying rather low, and so near the river that part of it was in-

clined to be damp; but when Mrs. Brown and her Lares and Penates, the eight-day clock, the old settle, and a handsome array of china dogs on the mantel-piece, were settled in, it had a very homeable look. There was, as she phrased it, room enough to turn round in. There was a kitchen, the home of the settle, the clock, and the china dogs; and an outer kitchen, dedicated to washing-tubs, garden-tools, &c., one of the walls of which was propped up by a pole to prevent it falling on the head of a passer-by.

“But it was safe enough if the stick was there, and why should anyone go to move it?” said her brother.

There was a nice strip of garden running by the side of the Sad, and rooms enough for her to be able to let one to a lodger, by which she could make an addi-

tion to her small income ; so, on the whole, the move appeared to have been an advantageous one for her.

On the evening after the fire she was sitting, as usual, very busy, braiding ; her chair was by the side of the fire, and a table was placed sideways before her, across which was thrown the net she was engaged on. Jem was loitering about in the room doing nothing, going out presently to fetch in some water, he said, when his mother remonstrated with him on his idleness.

There was another occupant of the small room, a man about thirty years of age, dressed in a manner something between a labourer and an artisan. He was a rather short, stout man, with a low forehead, and bushy eyebrows that nearly met ; he had lost the sight of one of his eyes,

apparently by some accident, but the other seemed capable of seeing as much as most people's two, and he had a way of looking round with this one eye almost without turning his head, so that those in the room with him were generally somewhat uncomfortably conscious that he was aware of all they were doing.

He was a stranger at Sadbroke, and had been introduced to Widow Brown by her brother, who said he had known him formerly, and that he had come to look out for work, and would be glad of a lodging, if she could take him in.

He now sat in the window, smoking a pipe, and reading his paper. Mrs. Brown did not like smoking, it dirtied the place, but she could not afford to be very particular, the lodger paid her eighteen-pence a week, and that kept them in firing, for

they could not burn less than that, she said, owing to the place being so damp.

“Why don’t ’ee get your book, Jem?” said she. “There do’ee, like a good boy. You’ll never read like maister there, if you don’t take more pains wi’ the larning,”

“The parson’s took’t my top and my marbles, and I ain’t agoing to larn just for to please he,” was the reply. “I be a-going to be even with he, that I be.”

“What nonsense you be talking up, Jem,” said his mother.

“Iv’e a-been robbed; I went to larn, not to have my things a-took’t,” was the reply.

“Go and fetch the water, there be a good boy, and don’t talk up no more such stuff. There’ll be Thompson’s money a-gied away next week, and if you goes and offends the parson, I shan’t, mayhap, get none o’ it.”

As she spoke there was a knock at the door.

“See who be there, Jem,” said she.

The boy opened the door. It was a dapper little man, who stood looking in; he had a very bright smile on his face, and looked as if he meant to make himself very agreeable, and wished to be asked in.

“It be Mr. Quaver, mother.”

“Ax Mr. Quaver to walk in, then, of course, Jem, can’t ee.”

The person in question was almost in before the invitation was given. He had a little bundle, tied up in a handkerchief, in his hand, and the handles of a pair of shears were sticking out of one of his pockets; for Mr. Quaver followed the honourable calling of a tailor, and had been on a short round among some of his more distant customers, to get orders

for a little mending and making. He had also another calling, although it was one more honorary than remunerative—it was that of violoncello-player at the brick chapel. He might get a few shillings for this, perhaps, at Christmas, when there was a collection made for the chapel-singers; but as the congregation was not a wealthy one, he played more as a pleasure and relaxation from harder work, than with any view to profit. But he was a very important little man, in his own estimation, and he felt the possession of his violoncello, and its green bag, made him very much looked up to.

“Good evening, Mrs. Brown,” said he. “I was just a-passing, and you being a new comer like, and me having known your good husband as is dead and gone, I thought I’d just a-come in and ask if

you was settled in pretty comfortable."

"'Tain't I as finds much fault," was the reply; "'twere cold to Sun Court, and it be wet here, but it does well enough. I doesn't a-want to be grumbling."

"'Tis a blessed thing, ma'am, to have a contented mind, which same is a continual feast," said Mr. Quaver, approvingly; "but I wishes you more than that, now, only just past Christmas time. I just a-stepped in to say as we be a-going to have a bit o' a tea feast in the little room next to the chapel—it be only sixpence a head, and the tea and cake quite uncommon, not to make no mention of a beautiful speech from one as is coming on purpose, which will be gived afterwards."

"Sixpences ain't plenty wi' me," said the widow, throwing the net, as she spoke, further over the table with a jerk, as its

increasing length required, but not, by so doing, delaying the flying needle for a moment; "me as have got nothing but my work to look to, and a great idle boy for all I've got to take care of me, 'cept it be a daughter as be married, and settled in 'Merriky."

"You'd most save it in not wanting no tea and no fire at home that evening," suggested the violoncello player.

"I bean't a chapel-goer, nother," said she; "I don't take kind to it."

"Laws! Mrs. Brown, that's because 'ee don't a-go to it; it be different, sure, to church, and a deal more pleasant and light like!"

"I likes church—I'se used to it. Mr. Saxon gied we a good sermon enough just afore we comed away. I thought I'd go and look at the church once agin

afore leaving. 'Twere 'How old be you?' There be some as mightn't like to be axed—I'm old enough not to mind."

"And what might he say on that subject, ma'am?" asked Mr. Quaver, who had now ensconced himself in a very comfortable chair on the opposite side of the fire.

Mrs. Brown attempted to give a *résumé* of the sermon, but could only recollect "the parson axed were you thirty, forty years old, on," as she said, "up to seventy, which same I'm not," continued the widow, in mournful parenthesis. "More's the pity, on the 'count of Robinson's bread."

"I didn't think you was that dark even to church, Mrs. Brown—I didn't, sure. Poor dear souls!" said Mr. Quaver, "to go axing ye of the years of your nat'rel

life, instead of a-thinking how many years had ye been in the bonds of iniquity; which means, I take it, mum," continued he reflectively, "how long have ye been sitting down in bondage to forms, in a church which have tied herself to a tyrannical and unmitigated State."

He did not quite know the meaning of the words he had used, but thought they sounded very well, and looked round on his little audience to see if his speech was not approved of.

"'Tis little I knows of church or chapel, either, sir," said the one-eyed man; "and I can't say I cares to know more; but I'se with you as consarns the State."

"I knows nought of the State," said Jem, who did not like to be shut out of the conversation; "but if the church means the parson, he've a-treated me real

shameful, axing me to go, and then having me caned for nothing, and I'm a-going to be even wi' he."

The man in the window scarcely moved his head, but he contrived to let Jem see he was looking at him with his one eye; and the boy, catching the glance, seemed very much like a bird who has been fascinated by a snake; but he muttered again—

"See if I bean't, that be all; and wi' Gain, too, who won't give me no work."

"Church be so good as chapel any day," said Mrs. Brown, standing up for the place she occasionally favoured with her presence; "and we've got the Bible there—you can't a-say nothin' agin that, Mr. Quaver."

"I'll tell you what I've heerd said once on that 'ere point by an oncommon fine

speaker as comed one time to our chapel. He said as there was some place in foreign parts where they'd a-tie down a poor soul to a dead body, and then bind 'em both on a wild horse. And that, said he, is like the Bible, as is tied to a dark church, which is carried away by a sinful and evil-minded State."

"The State goes on fast enough in giving pensions and money to they as don't want it, and in laying on taxes on the poor, but it be slow enough as to redressing wrongs, or doing of any good. However, the time is at hand when we's a-going to be righted. The power will come into the hands of they as knows how to use it for the good of the poor; and things will be very different soon, if people have only got a little bit of spirit," said the man in the window.

Mr. Quaver was becoming conscious that this conversation was taking a turn that might not be beneficial to a boy like Jem; and looking on himself as an instructor of the young, and, indeed, of the ignorant in general, he turned to him, saying,

“And how be you a-going on, my boy? Larning be a fine thing, one as we should all get when we can.”

“I bean’t a-going on at all,” replied the boy; “I be a-going off. I’m thinking of going in the travelling line. I went to school to larn, not to be robbed. The parson have set me a bad example, and he ain’t no right to find fault if I follers it.”

Again the look from the man in the window. Jem would not stand it any longer; he took the pitcher, and went out for water.

“And so, marm, you thinks as you can’t come to our little festivity,” said the musician. “We endeavours to make it as pleasant and agreeable as we can. There’s fine speaking, and beautiful music, though it’s not I as should say it, and plenty of the best of tea and sugar, not to speak of the cake, which my missus do say, and her be a judge of such things, ain’t to be got the likes of it nowhere to SADBorough.”

“Thank ye, Mr. Quaver,” replied the widow, still jerking the net as it got longer over the table, and not stopping her work an instant either for that or the talking. “I can’t a-spare the time; and, as I said afore, I doesn’t take kind to chapel; I goes to church when I goes anywhere; no offence meant, and thank ye all the same.”

“No thanks needed, marm. I only wished just to look in for a minute on one as I knew her husband and respected in times as is gone; and I only grieve to hear as you takes so kind to church, into which place I’ve not a-been since I was a boy, and was took’t by them as knew no better; and into which I’m determined I never sets my foot again. ’Tis a sin for they as have more knowledge to have anything to do with it.”

Jem came in with his pitcher of water, and said the constable from Sadborough had been searching all over the farmyard, and had found the flint and steel belonging to the tinder-box that was discovered the night before.

“Though how they knows that one belongs to the other, I can’t think,” said the

boy. "They'll fit the things to somebody next."

"The corn ain't much loss," said the one-eyed man; "it wasn't doing no good in the farm-yard, and it won't do any good now, that's all; the poor won't be none the worse now it's gone than if it had stayed."

"I was most a-thinking the church would have been burnt at one time," said Mr. Quaver. "I was thankful *we* was safe out of the way."

He meant by "we" the brick chapel.

"It looked dreadful, though, to see the light in the tower from here; it made me feel quite awsome like," said Mrs. Brown. "I couldn't go to bed, I was afeard of the thatch."

"Nor more didn't my missus, her was in such a way about the children; 'twas

a marcy 'twas no worse," said Mr. Quaver.

"I must say 'twould have grieved I terrible if the church had a-caught, though I can't say I likes this so well as thick down to Sadborough, nor Mr. Knightly nigh so well as Mr. Saxon, he be so young and wild like; sober folks suits me best, but I must say the church do look beautiful with the wreaths and all of it. I went last Sunday purpose to see it."

"You don't a-mean to say, Mrs. Brown, as you've got wreaths and garlands up to church, like as they dark heathen made, and a-twisted up to pay worship to Jupiter?" inquired Mr. Quaver. "I should really like to see 'em, not that I'd a-look on 'em, no, not if I was paid for that same; and as to going inside that church, it's where I shall never be, you depend on it."

"I don't suppose as any one cares to see

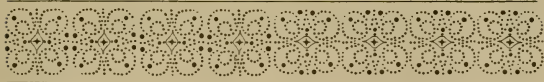
you there," said Mrs. Brown, rather sharply; "and why shouldn't 'em put up the wreaths and the crosses? I likes to see places look nice, I always did, and it does look uncommon pretty for sure. Church always is done up different to chapel; the gentlefolks goes there, and they likes it."

Notwithstanding her rude manner towards them, Mrs. Brown liked going to the same place of worship as the gentlefolks, and despised the brick chapel intensely. Mr. Quaver was so comfortable in his seat by the fire, he did not like to move and go out into the frosty air; but it was drawing on to his tea time, and as he had been out all day, Mrs. Quaver would be expecting him, besides he did not feel quite at home with Mrs. Brown, he did not think he should be able to draw her over to go to chapel, or even to the tea-meeting; and he was a little afraid

of the strange man in the window—he was not quite sure whether his views were the really true and excellent ones he held himself, or whether they were such as it would not become him, the father of a respectable family, and a small tradesman, as he called himself, of the village, and one of the supporters of the chapel, to approve of. So, taking up his little bundle which he had laid by his side, he rose, and as though to do away with the effects of anything that in the course of conversation might have been said that was wrong, he told Jem he hoped “he’d be a good boy, and go to school; they hadn’t no school to chapel; he wished they had, so he must take what he could get, and when he had got the larning, he could make better use of it than they as had taught him.” Then taking a friendly leave of Mrs. Brown, and a rather distant one of the man

in the window, who appeared to be reading his paper too diligently to attend to him, he went out of the cottage.





CHAPTER XV.

MR. QUAYER AT CHURCH.

WHEN the favourite hero of that most renowned of chroniclers, Cid Hamete Ben Engeli, fought his famous battle with the windmills, he did it in the full belief that he was engaged in combat on the side of right against giants of robbery and oppression. It was a deep and a bitter satire, yet one that never would have been written had not many such battles been fought in those days, and which, although we have most of us known the story from our childhood, does not prevent many more being

entered into even now. How many weapons are sharpened and polished to engage in such a cause! How much of purpose, will, strength, energy, time, and talent is expended in inveighing against and attempting to overturn things and institutions, harmless and oftentimes useful, while the demons of self and pride, in our own hearts, and of poverty and ignorance in the world around us, are allowed to reign and rule comparatively untouched and unharmed.

Alas! alas! that it should be so—that men should still prefer doing battle with the windmills rather than with those giant foes, within and without, against whom their weapons might do good service. Yet if this be indeed true, then by the memory of some small tilt that most of us at some time or other of our lives have run against an imaginary foe, with energies that

might have been so much better employed, let us at least show tenderness towards those whom we see engaged in a like visionary warfare. And therefore it is that I ask that some small share of pity, or at least forbearance, may be extended towards an action that is about to be recorded as having been perpetrated by Mr. Quaver.

It was quite true what that worthy had stated to Mrs. Brown, that he had not entered a church since he was a boy. He had determined he would not do so; he believed, or endeavoured to make himself believe, that he belonged to a higher and holier community; that a State church was a disgrace to the people who allowed such an establishment; that it told only of tyranny and oppression on the one hand, and slavery and ignorance on the other; and that all those who even entered one

of these buildings were helping and assisting, one way or the other, in continuing the wrong.

That evening he had been particularly determined in his asseverations that he never would enter a church. But when a person strenuously asserts he will never do anything, it seems as though some evil genius was equally determined he should, and so presses on the unfortunate victim, until the deed having been done past recall, he becomes suddenly aware of the presence of the evil imp, who, sitting there, as it were, on his shoulder, looks over into his face, grinning and mocking at the folly he has induced him to commit.

It therefore happened that, after leaving Mrs. Brown's cottage, instead of pursuing his way to his own home, Mr. Quaver went up the hill by the church. The door was

open just a little; he would never have perceived it had he not been looking intently at it. There was no one near; he looked carefully up and down the road; he would just go in and see what it was like; take one walk round; it was right he should see for himself what had been done, that he might denounce it in his speech at the approaching meeting, and then he would go home to tea.

He opened the little wicket-gate, and found himself in the churchyard; he entered the porch, pushed the door a little more open, and Mr. Quaver was at length in the parish church of Sadbroke. He looked around him; the Christmas decorations had not yet been taken down; they were not so fresh as when they were first put up, but the greater part still looked very green and bright. He walked round,

struck with amazement at all he saw. He read the inscription over the singing-gallery, and began to soliloquise :

“Poor dark souls !” said he to himself, “poor benighted creatures ! I didn’t think they were quite so bad as this. I know’d summut of this sort was done in Mr. Grey’s time, and I shouldn’t a-wondered at anything that went on down at Sadborough with Mr. Saxon, but I’d a-hoped better things of young Mr. Knightly. I’ve a-been looking, yea, a-straining of my eyes, for the time when he’d leave this here Great Babylon as is joined to the kings of the earth, and come and sit down in fellowship along with us, as calls no man master.”

He went a little further, still reading.

“ ‘ Peace on earth,’ well, that’s Scripture,

and I've nought to say agen Scripture ; but they read it in the light of their own dark hearts, the poor blinded souls ! They've a-got what they calls peace, and they covers it over with the flowers of this world ; but it's nothing more," he continued, speaking aloud in his excitement, "than the stagnant pool of fetid corruption, and they'll all be a-stifled in it when the time do come."

He did not exactly say amen audibly to this observation of his own, and yet at the same time it was a desire not very far from his heart. He continued his walk, observing the wreaths round the pillars, and muttering to himself something about garlands and sacrifices, and likening the curate to the priest of Jupiter, when his peregrinations brought him in due course to the chancel, and he saw the

small cross suspended over the communion-table, at which sight his indignation reached its highest pitch.

The feeling came over him that it was for him to shew the exceeding sinfulness of having put this up—that it was his mission to take it down. He mounted, almost unknowing what he was doing, upon one of the chairs; but he could not reach it. He was quite, by this time, carried away by his excitement; he mounted the table, he unfastened the little cross—it was easily done—the berries fell in a shower from his rough grasp; he flung it from him into the aisle.

“And they called it Nehushtan!” said Mr. Quaver.

He came down from his altitude with some difficulty, panting and puffing with the unusual exertion.

“I’ve a-lifted up my voice like a trumpet !” said he, speaking now quite aloud ; “I’ve a-torn down with my own hands the idol, and I’ll tread it under my feet !”

So, suiting the action to the word, he trampled, with well-meaning but most ignorant zeal, on the fragile little symbol ; the slender wooden support was rent into a hundred splinters, and the pavement was thickly stained with the juice of the berries.

Just at this moment he thought he heard a footstep, and a slight click, but looking round and seeing nothing, he continued his work. The light, which had been fading for some time, was now quite dying away. He began to think he would return home. He walked back through the aisle, still sighing in his spirit, but the fervour of his zeal was very much

abated, perhaps, now the deed was done, it did not look quite so well as he thought at the time—perhaps the cold of the evening had chilled it.

He went to the door—it was shut; he turned the handle, it did not open; he tried it harder, it was fastened; he rattled at it, he could not make it move. He called aloud, forgetting the danger of being discovered, there was no answer. Poor Mr. Quaver! Heavy drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, his limbs trembled under him, thoughts one after another crowded into his mind in a way they had never done before.

It was the hour when his wife would have ready for him the hot cup of tea which was to keep out the cold; there was nothing to keep it out here, and the consequence was, it got in. He shook more

and more ; the image of young Mr. Knightly, with that stern look which he had seen once or twice, presented itself to his imagination ; the apparition of Mr. Saxon seemed as although already present to his bodily eyes ; the presence of Mr. Knightly, sen., in his magisterial capacity, still more fearful, stood before the unhappy little tailor. He had not the slightest idea what punishment he had laid himself open to ; he had so talked himself into the belief of the tyranny of Church and State, that now, with the sense of having laid himself open to just censure, nothing seemed too bad for them to inflict upon him. He thought of doing penance in a white sheet, of being put into prison, of being sent beyond seas. He thought of a certain little box with a chimney in it, which stood on his mantel-piece—he thought all it con-

tained might be taken—that is, if they were very lenient—as a fine; that might not be enough; he thought of a snug little sum in the savings bank, that might be required; and—oh! fearful thought!—if they got hold of it, they would doubtless spend it in adorning the church!

By this time it was quite dark—the moon had not yet risen; when it did, he thought he would try the windows, and walk round to the small door, in hopes of finding that unfastened. He therefore went into the best pew he could find, and wrapping himself up as warmly as he could in the cushions and carpets, fell asleep.

When he awoke, the clock struck eight—it was the hour when Mrs. Quaver was wont to prepare for her *caro sposo* something still better than tea, for the same

purpose, to keep out the cold. He thought of the snug little room, the kettle singing merrily on the hob; and at the thought of all this, the cold got in still more. He thought again of all the terrors of the law that could be inflicted upon him if he should be found. He went round to look for the little door; when at length he found it, it was fastened as hopelessly as the other. The windows were too high for him to attempt to try them—he returned to the pew.

“They’d never a-punish anyone worse than this,” said he to himself; “I’d rather be in prison to once. How do I know but the White Lady may come herself—it’s the very night of the full moon, I do believe!”

He had not thought of this before—it was a dreadful idea! The White Lady

was not supposed to extend her walk so far, but she might do so—church people were much such Papishers as she was—she might come on purpose to punish him, and the unfortunate man's teeth chattered in his head at the mere idea.

The clock struck hour after hour; never had hours seemed so long to him before. He thought of the agony and distress of Mrs. Quaver; he thought of the tears and the fears of the little Quavers. At length he again fell into a slumber, out of which he awoke with a terrified start, thinking he felt the chill breath of the White Lady on his cheek—it was but a cold blast of the night air that blew in through a chink in the window. The moon was now shining in its full beauty, lighting up the church almost as if it were day, although with something of an almost unearthly brightness.

He again left the pew, and piling some cushions on a seat beneath one of the windows, contrived with difficulty to look out. The churchyard lay in perfect stillness, the moon shining with cold lustre on the graves; opposite was the ruin of the farmhouse, a sad miserable object in the bright light of day—a weird and spectral one at this hour of the night. He could not bear to look at it; he would return again to the pew—it was the best place. He was getting down off the cushions, when he saw two figures emerge from behind a wall of the ruin, and enter in at the wicket gate of the churchyard.

The simplest figure in the world may be changed by the fear of a terrified imagination into something as different as possible from itself; and when this imagination is aided by the uncertain beams of the moonlight,

nothing is too outrageous to be supposed.

They were unmistakeably men, or, rather, a man and a boy; but the white light fell on them both strongly, and Mr. Quaver most fully and entirely believed it was the White Lady, accompanied by some other nun, also, as he afterwards declared, dressed in a long white veil, who had come to carry him away.

How he got out of the window he never knew; how he found his way through the church, he was never able to describe; how he entered the belfry, always remained as much a mystery to himself as to others; but in some way he did reach it, and just at the very time that the clock peeled forth the hour of twelve, rung stroke after stroke, heavy, dull, terrified strokes, on one of the bells.

It startled everyone from their sleep;

people do not at once sink down into their usual state of quiescence after such an event as the fire of the night before; and fire was in everyone's thoughts, and on the lips of not a few when the sound was heard. The village was astir; the inquiry passing from mouth to mouth, "Where be it?—where be the fire now?"

But there was no fire, and, indeed, the keys of the church were safe in the possession of the sexton. Under these circumstances, it needed much courage to enter the church; but the sexton and parish constable did at length undertake the adventure; and there, in the belfry, lying on the floor, almost senseless with terror and cold, was the miserable Mr. Quaver!

The distress of his wife for some hours had been very great. She had formed a hundred ideas, none of them very reason-

able, as to what had become of her husband. He was drowned in the Sad; "he'd a-run away from his home;" he was gone to look for work; he was gone away to a chapel. But when the bell rang out, not being, like the rest, awoke out of sleep, she came at once to a just idea of the cause of his absence, exclaiming:

"He've a-been and a-got hisself shut up in the church!"

Mrs. Quaver was a tall, strong-minded woman, and not being afraid of ghosts, went immediately to the sexton; and it was she who insisted on the church being opened, and going in with the sexton and constable, found her husband in the state that has been described.

The next morning, when James Knightly went over to Sadbroke, he heard the tale, with many alterations and many additions.

The White Lady had certainly paid a visit to the village. "She'd a-shut up Mr. Quaver in the church; he'd never have a-gone there of himself," said those of his own persuasion. "He went there after no good," said others; but no one had been into the church since they found him, nor had the sexton even then gone round.

The curate procured the keys, and went in. All looked much as usual; he walked through the aisle, and up the church, and did not miss the cross until he saw something lying on the ground, and then, looking up, he saw what had taken place.

He was naturally very angry; he had admired the little cross, with its green leaves and red berries, so very much; it had been so very kind of Maude to interest herself in doing anything for his church, and that she should be requited

in this manner by any of his people was really most shameful. But then, far worse was the desecration of the church, the tearing to pieces of the holy symbol; he did feel it was quite an act of profanity.

He went round the church, and found nothing else had been touched; the poor-box had evidently not been opened, the books and everything else appeared right. By the time this survey was over, his anger had cooled down considerably. He did not think it less wrong, but his thoughts had now run again into their usual channel, and pity and commiseration for the folly and miserable ignorance that could have induced any one to act in such a manner were the uppermost feelings in his heart. He felt sure, himself, knowing the man, that it was Mr. Quaver who had done it; but as the sexton owned to having left the

church door open, he had no actual evidence to prove it. Some other person might have entered and done the mischief, and then Mr. Quaver might have come in, and been the one caught, through his own stupidity. Besides, he felt sure no punishment could have been devised so terrific to the unfortunate man as the one he had brought on himself; and the curate was cruel enough to enjoy the thought that such was the case, and to image to himself, with some pleasure, Mr. Quaver's horror when he really found he had to spend the night alone in the church.

So, after locking the door carefully, he took the key back to the sexton, and told him that some mischievous person had injured part of the decorations; he should inquire into the matter, but as they were all becoming faded, they had better be

taken down, and the church cleared before the next Sunday ; and at the same time he desired the man to be careful in future not to leave the door open. It was very sad to think that people could not be allowed to go in and out of the church at any time ; but as they had proved they could not be trusted, for the present, at least, it must certainly be kept locked.

The sexton appeared very much shocked to hear what had occurred, and promised to be more careful in future. The curate then proceeded to call on Mr. Quaver ; the door was opened, in answer to his knock, by Mrs. Quaver. She was not altogether surprised to see him, although she knew nothing of the matter of taking down the cross, her husband having most carefully kept his own counsel with respect to it.

“Is Mr. Quaver at home? I wish to speak to him,” was the inquiry.

“He’s at home, sir, but he’s in bed; he’ve a-caught a dreadful cold,^d and he’s fit to see no one.”

The curate did not by any means credit this story, but he was not at all inclined to be compassionate towards Mr. Quaver if he was ill.

“I’ve been into the church,” he said, “and I find that a most disgraceful attack was made last night upon part of the decorations; as I understand your husband was shut up in the church, and frightened the people of the village by ringing the bell at midnight, of course I must suppose he was the person who did the mischief.”

Mrs. Quaver was enlightened at once; she felt as sure as her informant who had been the perpetrator of the mischief, but

she was equal to the emergency, and did her best for her husband.

“You must have made a great mistake, sir,” she said. “My husband was unfortunate enough just to go into the church, finding it open, and he not being quick of hearing, did not know when they shut the door; but to think of a man as is a respectable tradesman, and the father of six small children, who he wishes to bring up honest and decent, and one who works reg’lar, morning, and, as I may say, almost night too, a-doing of wrong to anybody, is a thing as can’t be. You knows what my husband is, Mr. Knightly, and you know he’d no more do harm to the church than you would to the chapel—you who saved the other, sir!”

The compliment was the worst part of

the speech, it nearly lost her her cause.

“I wish to speak to your husband himself.”

“Law, sir, I’ve a-just tookt him up some gruel, and I hopes he’s asleep; ’twas a dreadful night for any one to be out in that church, and he not strong either. I do wonder”—and she put up her apron to her eyes—“I do feel terribly hurted”—and she sobbed aloud—“that you should ever have thought my husband”—and she gasped as she spoke the word—“could have a-done such a wicked—wicked thing!”

She was sobbing and crying in great distress by the time the speech was ended, but he was very hard-hearted.

“I shall call again,” he said, turning away.

Mr. Quaver had heard it all; he was not asleep, he had not had any gruel,

but the sound of the curate's voice made him hotter than any gruel could have done. He admired his wife's readiness and self-possession extremely, she certainly was a wonderful woman; but he knew well enough she would give him a good scolding now, and not easily forget the matter. And so she did; he would ruin her, and the six small children, she told him. It had only been her who had saved him, if he was saved; but Mr. Knightly looked very angry, and no wonder he was going to call again, and what would he do then?

He was really ill with a bad cold, and all this row and anxiety made his head ache terribly. On the whole, he was pretty well punished for what he had done.

In the course of the day James Knightly saw Mr. Saxon, and told him what had happened.

“You’d much better be quiet, James,” he said. “If you make a martyr of a fellow like that, you’ll set them all up to a degree, that even your preaching will not be enough to keep people from the brick chapel.”

It was good advice. James took the first opportunity that offered of speaking seriously to Mr. Quaver on the subject, who prevaricated as much as possible, but did not altogether deny the act, and the curate enjoyed seeing that he was desperately frightened. No further notice was taken of the affair, but no one ever again did any mischief to the little church at Sadbroke.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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